

# The Squirrel - Revised



Dennis Ciscel

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## Forward

I love poetry. I have thought in  
poetry and heard in poetry and read  
poetry and written poetry all  
of my life. I remember sitting in  
the dirt driveway of our house in  
Minneapolis, before I had begun school,  
maybe 4, not likely 5, playing with  
little plastic cowboys and indians  
while making up rhymes to say to them.

I was the boy in school who would quote  
remembered poetry. I was the boy  
who would go to the library and stand  
in the stacks reading poetry to myself  
when no one else was around.

For me, meaning comes in meter, feeling  
comes in rhyme. For me vowels inform the  
emotion and consonants drive the base  
line and the percussion of the music.

I think that poetry  
is the native tongue of humankind.  
I have met others who feel the same way.  
And others who feel the native tongue is  
music or painting or you get the picture.

It is an art form, clean and simple.  
I never bothered myself about  
whether it was true or false, Although, later,  
when asked if a poem were true I took  
to answering "Of course it's true. But  
there's no point in ruining a good poem  
with historical accuracy."

So, I never considered, even for a moment,  
that there may have once really been a  
raven that often repeated “Nevermore!”

Poetry is supposed to be dangerous.  
It is supposed to be honest – just  
like all the other arts. But for someone  
to believe it is history, or that  
it is all about me, is to miss the  
point. It is all fantasy. And it is  
fantasy about all of us.

The Winter morning,  
with chilled feet and light drafts on  
my neck and shoulders,  
gave way to a warm, country  
drive in the convertible.

Ravens strutted (heads  
high and self-assured) along  
the gravel roadways.  
White tailed deer grazed quietly  
in the meadows near the trees.

Tilted, weathered barns,  
old abandoned rusted trucks,  
farming equipment,  
and fallen trees were scattered  
all along the drive. Then, Spring.

Near the end of his  
second decade all of the  
lies came tumbling down,  
and nothing worked anymore.  
And he was very confused.

There was not enough  
Money or Sex or Drugs in  
the world, but he kept  
on trying to have Them solve  
all of life's little problems.

Sooner or later,  
he was going to have to kill  
himself or ask for  
help. But he was not the kind  
of man who asks for help. The

long dark spiral (that  
we had thought he was on for  
some years) now began  
in earnest. Solutions and  
Hope gathered around him, all

waiting for him to  
look up and ask them to come  
to his aide. But no  
request was made, and he just  
stumbled forward to the grave.

There are lots of men  
out there. Some of them are cute.  
Some interesting.

You're the one I want,  
the one I love, and the one  
I want to be with.

Laughter echoes through  
the hallways of time, while two  
or three, with faces  
stern, think to themselves, "This is  
serious. This is important."



Two weeks before Alan died, I stopped by on my way home from work one afternoon. I didn't know that he had lung cancer. I just stopped by to say hello. We had a very nice visit – nothing big or memorable – just a very nice visit.

When his wife called to tell me he had died I was surprised and horrified. When I realized he had not told me how ill he was, I was also very angry – with him – for lying to me by omission: For not letting me know what was going on.

Some months later, another mutual friend told me he and Alan had spoken of my visit a few days after I had been there. He asked Alan if he had told me of his Cancer, and Alan had replied, “Why? We were having such a nice visit.”

I bore some more anger for him lying to me, for several more years. Then, one day, I realized that I had not told a friend of some of my current ills when we happened to run into each other and spent half an hour talking. When I asked myself why I had not mentioned all of the news, I wondered to myself, “Why mention it? We were having such a nice visit.”

When we arrived at the campground, the ranger said there was only one other camper there and we could have our pick of sites. Looking around to choose our place, we never even saw the other camper who was supposed to be there. We chose a spot high on the hillside overlooking the rocks and trees and, further below us, the desert.

Later, a young Spanish couple took a campsite about a hundred yards away. We could hear them talking and could barely see their campfire through the trees.

After dinner and a little walk, we lay down and fell asleep with the cool breezes from the hills blowing down towards the valley over our skin.

I love the evening breezes blowing against my skin when we go camping.

We awoke some time later touching each other and needing still more touch.

It was gentle and furious, and it took everything that we had left.

After cleaning up a little bit, we lay very close to one another and spoke softly of our love.

From across the campground  
came the Spanish woman's laughter.

I raised  
my head to look in their direction, and  
their campfire was still only barely  
visible through the trees.

The moon, which was 2  
or 3 days past the first quarter, had just  
passed the highest point in its night and painted  
everything beneath it, but the flames,  
silvery gray.

Silvery gray myself,  
I lay back down beside my love and returned  
to speaking softly.

The Spanish lady  
continued to laugh occasionally  
across the darkness. After a few times,  
I stopped looking up at the barely  
visible flames through the trees. She could laugh all  
she wanted for all I cared.

The number  
one rule of making love in the woods is  
to be quiet. We obeyed the rule as  
well as we could. Not everyone does. We  
breathed deeply and grandly, but no moans or  
calling out. Then, after cleaning up a  
little, we spoke very quietly to  
one another: Whispers.

But as we whispered  
to one another, the Spanish lady's  
laughter came again and again.

Finally, we drifted off to sleep. I was as naked as the day I was born, and we were serenaded by our breathing and the occasional laughter through the night. All of us were in love.

After the moon had set, I awoke and went outside to look at the night sky. The stars. The Milky Way. No flames or human lights were visible. No sounds but the insects and a Bob White calling.

Quietly, the world was following the number one rule of making love in the woods. Heartbeats were there. Breathing was there. Love was still there. And no one had made a sound.

One weekend when I was 20, I loaded my van with half a dozen surfboards and half a dozen friends and we went to Galveston for the day. We had a great day in the sand and sun and surf. That night, I was in my driveway unloading the surfboards and taking the roof racks off and putting them in the garage and I turned around and there was an officer with his revolver drawn and cocked. And it was pointed at my abdomen. And he wanted to talk to me about what I was doing there. I fondly remember that day at the beach, but not that cop talking to me.

He wanted to know who I was. He wanted to know where I lived. He wanted me to prove it, even though I was dressed in shorts and flip-flops and didn't even have the keys to my car in my pockets much less some ID. He didn't like my answers. He wanted to know if I had any drugs – I replied, incredulously, “No.” (Because there weren't any on me. Only flip-flops and shorts and a surf board.) After a long, silent pause, he put the hammer down on his revolver and re-holstered it. He barked, “Be more careful next time,” and he turned and walked off into the darkness.

As he was leaving, I didn't say a word, but, inside, I wondered what that had been about. I was in my own driveway, working on my own car, putting my own

surfboards in my own garage, and he thought I needed to “Be more careful next time?” I mean was this all just because I was a long-haired hippy weirdo with an old Volkswagen van with paisley curtains and peace symbols and surfboards on it? Even now it doesn't take much thinking to know the answer to that one. But things have changed since then. I may still be a hippy in my mind. But, I look like an old white Grandfather.

Being stopped by the police is different now. The last time I was stopped, the cop was angry. I didn't belong there. I wasn't from there. I was driving too fast. He wanted my driver's license and proof of insurance. He wanted to know where I was going. He wanted to know who I thought I was. Then, I remembered to give him my concealed carry permit. I didn't have a gun with me, but the law is that I still need to present my permit to the police as part of my ID. He looked at it and knew that I was a member of America's great (and white)

militia. His mood changed. He smiled at me. Politely, he said, with all the sweetness of the Old South, “Please be more careful driving Through my county. Hope you have a good trip.”

A friend told me he was possessed by demons. He said he was getting so tired of it. And he said they treated him as if he wasn't even there. They just did as they wanted with his body. All he could do was go along for the ride: Just like a roller coaster (although not as much fun).

At one point, during a brief period of control, he went to a priest and asked for an exorcism. The priest told him they don't believe in demons anymore and he couldn't have an exorcism. The priest sent him to a psychiatrist.

Interviewing with the psychiatrist, the demon took over complete control: Ran the conversation. A week later the psychiatrist sent a letter that said there was no psychopathology and suggested he find a good faith healer.

The first faith healer he went to said that she was really only a reader not a healer. She sent him to a healer who told him that she dealt only with the physical illnesses and that he was probably beyond all human help. "Maybe," she proposed, "you should just sign the papers and let the devil have your soul." She had heard that that would satisfy the devil – for a while, not eternity.

I could see why he was getting tired of it. I know I would have been. Maybe when I was 25 it would have been fun. But we were getting too old for it now.

I told him to try turning inside out and saying to the beast, “Look, just leave me alone. I’m tired of this shit. And I’m too old for this shit. And you have nothing to offer me.” He told me, later, that he had tried it, and he thinks it might have worked.



There was an older man, who was crazy. He was very shabby and completely quiet, and he never changed his clothes or bathed. Every few months he would disappear for a while and then reappear with a new, clean set of clothes. And he would wander the neighborhood for a few months and then disappear again. I always figured he was back in the State Hospital and would reappear with fresh clothes because they had to burn the ones he was wearing when he came back in. The rumor was that he had been a successful architect. That he had even taught at the University. That he had designed several of the 1950's buildings in town – what we call “Mid-Century Modern.” But he had de-compensated at some point and had never come back to our reality.

One day I came home from work and he was sprawled in the yard in front of my house. I walked over and was looking down at him trying to see if he was breathing, and he opened his eyes with a jerk. He peered up at me across the great distance. I asked if he was alright. He nodded his head, “Yes.” And I said, “Okay. I was just worried that you might have died.” He did not know who or what I was, so, I just asked him to not sleep on my lawn anymore and turned away and left him there. From then on, he would walk down the street on the sidewalk and when he got to our house he would step off

the curb into the gutter. He never once set foot on my property again.

In the last days of my drug using, I found a mannequin of a boy beside a dumpster. I took him home, patched the broken fiberglass in his back and neck, dressed him in Goodwill boyhood gear, and stood him up in my living room as a roommate.

I named him Christopher, which was also an alias I had been recently using and the name of the street I was living on. It was only a month or two before I went into treatment. He and my cat saw the worst of my addiction.

My cat ran off and found a new owner. But Christopher couldn't do that. I was in treatment for 5 months. When I got out, I had a garage sale, and Christopher did go away. But he will always stay the last witness to my old way of life.

Today, I saw a broken mannequin in a department store, and I remembered lots of things from long ago. I wished that I could find Christopher again and make it up to him. He was too young and too innocent to be exposed to all that

madness.

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I was talking with  
a friend recently who  
interrupted one  
of my trains of thought with the  
observation, "That is what we

call a Sincere Delusion!  
It is a worthy idea!  
You mean well by it!  
We'd all like for it to be so!  
It is sincere!  
But, it is complete bullshit."

Just a little kiss  
on your neck, below your ear.  
It is nothing more.

It'll be over before you know it.  
And what will you have to show for it? Well,  
for one thing, you won't be there to show off  
all of those things you saved to show for it.

We have achieved our  
only goal. We have died in  
each others' arms.



Sometimes  
I become resentful  
that I am only a little brown sparrow.

So I pray that when that happens  
the wind will remind me  
I can fly.

Alright, let me get this straight.  
You clearly remember the conversation.  
And you clearly remember the points of concern.  
And you clearly remember agreeing to our plan  
of how we were going to handle it.

And you clearly remember that you and I both  
gave each other our word  
that we would live by that agreement.

And we proceeded accordingly.

And yet, here you are – 45 years later – still  
not sure if that was the best idea, and still  
not living up to your word.

Jesus.  
It must be lonely  
to live inside a body with such a mind and heart.

The Huisache trees are  
in bloom all around town.

Their smell is so sweet  
it's almost overwhelming,  
almost offensive.

But only almost.

“How are you today?” said the pretty young man at the other end of the park bench. I knew he was there, but I had ignored him. When I saw the bench and decided to sit down and rest for a moment, I almost went looking for another bench because I was afraid I would stare at him too much. But I sat down without looking at him further at all. Trying to reply, I looked over toward him, but not eye to eye, “I beg your pardon?” I said looking at his left thigh and how it rounded into his behind and arched into his back. “How are you today?” came again.

“Oh,” I lied, “I’m fine. And you?” and we broke into the chatter of complete strangers. I continued to not look him in the eye. Then he said something that made me look up into his eyes and see his happy, young face: smile, bright cheerful eyes, and all: A Portrait Of A Youth On Park Bench.

They say that you can tell a lot looking a man in the eyes. I can’t, but they say you can. I can’t tell if a man is honest or crazy or any of that stuff. But when I looked him in the eyes there was no doubt that the sparkle in his eyes was saying, “You!” I am almost 70

years old. And I have been picked out of many lineups before. He had just chosen me! He was flirting with me! And then it

came up that he lived there and I was just visiting. "So this," he said, "is our once in a lifetime opportunity." "Well, every day is a once in a lifetime opportunity," I replied. "If there is anything I have learned by my age it is that 'Every day is a once in a lifetime opportunity.'" And he continued to smile as if we were alone in silence. The conversation was incidental, inconsequential,

unnecessary background noise to our flirting. Physically he was no closer. Emotionally, he was inside me. It has been a long time since anyone has looked at me that warmly, that kindly, that intently or earnestly. I was a complete goner. I can't even tell you what he really looked like. I mean hair, eye color, clothes, none of it. He was a very nice looking young man who had picked me for the afternoon or the rest of our lives: It was our once in a lifetime opportunity. Regrettably, I know I am an older man now. There was

no way to act this one out the way it could be. I grasped my cane tightly and pulled myself back up to my feet. Then, smiling gratefully, I told him I had enjoyed meeting and visiting and wished him a lovely afternoon. And I walked away. It wasn't my opportunity to find love at last. I have my love already. It was my opportunity to spend the afternoon considering how nice

it is to still be found attractive and  
to still be able to give a man a  
little optimistic pleasure – to give  
each other Our Smiles, and A Little Hope.

Because it had been raining earlier,  
 I decided not to take my camera  
 along on my morning walk in the woods.  
 I didn't want it to get wet. Only  
 50 yards from the head of the trail, there  
 was a rabbit in my way and I thought,  
 "Oh hell, I should have brought my camera."

In the end, it was just as well. There was  
 too much going on to photograph it all.  
 Aside from the rabbit there were squirrels and  
 possums and raccoons. And birds! The forest  
 was heavy with their singing. The music  
 was enormous. Cardinals and Mockingbirds  
 and Swallows and Jays and Sparrows flew by.

And the flowers were amazing. The summer  
 bloom had come, and Indian Blankets were  
 everywhere. They were interspersed with Blue  
 Bonnets, still, and White and Purple Thistles,  
 Rain Lilies and Day Lilies and dozens  
 of Daisies and Coreopsis and all  
 the other small yellow and white flowers

and Day Flowers and Skeleton Flowers  
 and Blue Horse mint and Purple Horse mint and  
 Gray Horse mint and yellow and orange cactus  
 and Nightshade and . . . All of the wildflowers were  
 fighting each other for space and light in  
 every clearing. Large. Small. It was beyond  
 photography. It was beyond vision.

It was a very good walk in the woods.

The trip was good for our souls. At Glacier we camped in a clearing surrounded by a thicket of huckleberry and wild roses and grasses that were two to three feet tall. Of course there were many other plants, like wild flowers of yellow and blue and white and purple, but the body of the green plant- wall was the huckleberry and rose brush – with their green to reddish-brown berries and their pink flowers. The only trees were young aspens. They were all only about fifteen or twenty feet tall, and they were pretty widely scattered. It was easy to presume that this was the site

of a terrible forest fire maybe twenty years ago. But all of that was covered with this new growth. In the morning, we were wakened by the birds singing. It is good for the soul to hear birds sing. When the breeze blew across the area, the wind in the leaves of the bushes and the trees made a sound like rushing river waters. A sound that is good for the soul. When we walked to the actual river there was a cow moose with two calves beside her grazing on the grasses in the shallows. On a hill across the way, we saw a black bear and a brown bear staying

away from other – and away from us. In another clearing we saw two young bucks, with spike antlers in the velvet, playing with each other. There were many



animals about. It was good for the soul to be in the wild. And, although there was fatigued and frustrated anger at moments, we lay in each other's arms through the night. We touched each other kindly and gently and earnestly. We were glad for each other's company and wanted only the best for each other. That, too, is good for the soul. The whole trip was very good for our souls. And our minds. And our hearts.

Of course there is no way to be certain, but every now and then I wonder if I might have been Gertrude Stein in a previous lifetime. There has always been something about her work that I just got. I mean all of her writings make perfect sense to me. And I love having the walls all covered with objects and art. And I can so clearly see everything that taught Hemingway and Fitzgerald. And I have always just loved Alice B. Toklas.

I had a friend some years ago who was convinced he had been a Centurion 2000 years ago in the Roman Empire. He still had that kind of swagger and attitude about him: Sure he could have been standing at the crucifixion of the Christ. Though he claimed to recall it all clearly, he also had to admit that he had no recollection of an other life up until this present. Then again, were he at the crucifixion, it would have made perfect sense that he should have to spend 2000 years as a dung beetle, and then be born back into our human form as a cocaine addicted country musician from Oklahoma. God is not always swift in his retribution.

On this date in 1956, I saw a young man dancing in a juke joint in Medford Lakes New Jersey. He was just wearing blue jeans and a white t-shirt. He had the cuffs rolled up on his jeans and a pack of cigarettes rolled up in the left sleeve of his t-shirt. He was barefooted. His girlfriend was dancing in white bobby socks, a white poodle skirt with several petticoats, and a wide, tight, stretch black top.

In those days, it was against the law to dance in Medford Lakes. It was astounding. I wanted to be him or her or them so badly. It hurt my 10 year old soul.

In New York City, I went to St Mark's Church to visit their Poetry Project. Afterward, I saw Jimi Hendrix walk down the street in green bell bottoms and a yellow pirate shirt, with a guitar hung over his shoulder. And thought to myself, "That really is him. Poetry at the church. Jimi on the street. Wow. This is it!"

I believe that it was in the Spring of 1968, but it's hard to be sure. It was daytime, and it was not cold enough for us to be wearing jackets. It's really hard to be more precise about anything in the 1960s.

I was younger then.

I mean I was an adult male with a job and a house and a car, but it was 20-odd years ago.

I lived 30 miles out in the country on a piece of land that had been a cattle ranch and some years before had been divided up into plots for people from the city to come out to and built their own houses.

Most of us had an acre or two, and some had purchased larger plots of up to a hundred acres. Some of us were fairly rich and had built grand places, and some of us were in old mobile homes and kind of trashy, but most of us were in between.

I lived on an acre that bordered back up against the property that was still used for cattle, so my backyard ended with a barbed wire fence, beyond which was open land with wildflowers and wildlife and the cattle.

I had a garage/workshop in the backyard, and next to that I had an old aluminum storage building on a concrete pad. Beside my place, on both sides, were neighbors with similar simple houses and families. On the west side the neighbor was an old man who had built a couple of houses so that he and his wife and the kids and all the grandkids all lived on

the same two or three acres.

On the east side,  
George and his wife were retired and had  
extended family come and go on a regular basis,  
but, mostly, it was just them. My daughter  
had grown and gotten married and moved away.  
So I was there alone.

Generally it was quiet and pretty.  
It was all on dirt roads in the middle of  
nowhere. The nearest law enforcement was  
half an hour away, or more, and we didn't  
have much need for them. I was interested  
in marksmanship and occasionally had to  
sit at the back porch and take out little  
critters that had become destructive to  
my house or disruptive in some other way.

My neighbor across the road took great pride  
in his ability to keep his property  
free of squirrels and raccoons with his  
little 410 shotgun. No beasties lived  
in our attics or crawl spaces. Period.

One night I was wakened by a great  
rattling noise in my back yard. It sounded  
like someone was beating on the aluminum  
storage building with hammers – several of them  
at once. I looked out the bedroom window  
and could see nothing. I mean it was a  
full moon night so everything was  
illuminated in gray light. But I  
could see no thing or no one making the  
noise. It continued and escalated more.  
It sounded like a mountain lion had  
gotten into the aluminum shed  
and couldn't get out and was trying

to tear the place apart.

I turned from the window,  
grabbed my stainless steel 357 revolver  
and stepped out into the night wearing only  
my white boxer shorts. The noise ended  
the moment I opened the door.

Nothing ran away into the night.  
The shed was still closed up.  
The breeze was very light.  
And I was just standing in my backyard  
with moonlight illuminating me  
and my stainless steel 357  
and my white boxer shorts.

I waited there in the silence for a few minutes.  
Nothing was going on.  
I went back inside and back to bed.

In the morning I went to town  
and went to work. But all day long  
in the back of my head  
I wondered what the ruckus had been that night.

When I got home,  
George was in his yard working and  
I walked over and asked him if he too  
had been wakened by the great noise  
in my backyard the night before.  
“Yes,” he said, he had.

He agreed that it had sounded  
like something big was in my aluminum shed  
and wanted to get out. He said that,  
in fact, several other neighbors had  
talked with him about it that day

and no one knew what it was.  
I said that I had bailed out of bed in my boxers  
and grabbed my stainless steel 357  
to go out and see what was going on,  
but it stopped the moment that I opened my door.  
“Yes,” he said, “we saw you.”

“We?” I asked.

It turned out that several of my neighbors  
had beaten me out of their back doors,  
not having paused to grab any firearm,  
and saw me standing in the moonlight  
armed and dangerous but mostly undressed  
at 2AM.

“Geeez,” I said to George.  
“So now everyone in the neighborhood  
knows that I am the guy who will  
show up in white boxers and my 357!”

“No, no,” George said. “Don’t feel bad.  
That is important information for all of us to have.

“All we all talked about, today, was  
that now we all know that you will show up  
ready to help! Ready to kill whatever beast  
has come out of the darkness!  
And you won’t care that you  
are still in your white boxers.  
That is important information.”

Times have changed since then.



For the whole course of our relationship, Mike and I have joked about how one of us would begin to be puny the moment the other began to feel better.

This was most exemplified by allergies: First him then me, then me then him, etc. etc. I've been using my cane again for the past month or so. (First time I've needed it that much in several years.) I've had a bout of back pain, leg pain, hip pain and attendant balance issues, and I grabbed one of my canes as soon as it began. It's been getting better for the last week or so and I had completely stopped using a cane inside of the house – plenty of stuff to grab if out of balance – but I've still carried one almost everywhere when out and about.

But Mike pulled his back out of whack this afternoon and came home in much discomfort. He grabbed one of my canes as fast as he could to help him hobble around.

Watching him go off to bed earlier this evening, leaning on the cane and moving very slowly, I thought, "Love Is A Many Splendored Thing." And then I wondered, "Or is it a many splintered thing?" Both. And that is good.

When I was a little boy, one of the clearest stages of transition from boyhood to manhood was being able to carry a knife. I believe that I got my first knife at the age of 5. It proved that I was responsible and would not use it inappropriately. It proved that I knew how to handle sharp objects without cutting myself or anyone else. I carried it proudly. Its main use was opening an occasional box or envelope. But I also sharpened many a stick with it. For my tenth birthday I was given a beautiful Case

sheath knife with stag horn scales and an embossed leather sheath – probably about 8 inches long overall. (I still have it but I am not going to go measure it for this discussion.) I have carried it on my belt for many a walk in the woods. I tried to learn how to throw a knife by tossing it into many a tree, but I never was any good at that. It has opened many a box, cut many a rope or string, and sharpened many a stick. Other knives have come and gone since then. They have all been utility knives, which means they were useful and I used them. I've never been

in a knife fight. I never practiced knife fighting. I have met many people who have never had a pocket knife and think it is weird to carry one. My grandsons have grown up in a world that shuns them and

are amazed that I would have one. Now, I carry a CRKT M4-02 with stag scales. It is a very good knife that I recently found, new, for under forty dollars. It can be found with scales of wood, white bone, or stag horn – prices range from thirty-five dollars to about seventy. They even have them on eBay (but don't buy the ones that will ship from overseas –

they are probably counterfeit.) The M4-02 meets the legal definition of a pocket knife and is legal anywhere a knife may be carried (not schools and such). They even make a spring assisted version, but that is illegal in some jurisdictions. On TV, this morning, one of the talking heads said we should now all be carrying knives to protect ourselves against terrorists. (Which is Very Stupid Advice if you're not trained in knife fighting!) But, if you wish to try it, remember that you should never carry a knife until you are mature enough

to handle it properly. Then practice its use. You do not want to be in a dangerous situation and make it worse by not knowing how to use your knife: Open Boxes; Cut Ropes and Strings; Throw it at Trees; Sharpen Sticks; Do Not Cut Yourself.

Does the old, dry sunflower in the field,  
alone on its stalk, wonder where the one  
butterfly that changed everything has gone?  
Does it yearn to be touched again by yet  
another – any one at all will do?  
Once bright and vibrant, does it wish to have  
its youth back again to help it to sway  
in the breezes more gracefully in time  
with the music of the sunshine or rain?

I'm sure it does. It is the nature of  
things. It is not a personal failing  
or weakness. It is just the way God made  
us all, to yearn for more and better and  
longer still. Otherwise we would vanish.

As I age, I am turning more and more  
back to my poetry. It is one of  
my meditation tools. It is the  
ringing in my ears. For years –  
from as early as I can remember –  
I would hear the meter and rhyme of conversations  
wherever I went.

That stopped completely  
and abruptly  
in 1997.

Although I continued to publish,  
my writing was slowed by my not being sure  
of the sounds.  
Perhaps older now, and weakened,  
it has returned. And  
I am grateful for it. And  
I will dance to it.

My conclusion is that  
caterpillars do not even know  
that butterflies exist.

Bobby had dark black hair, the kind that shown dark blue in the sunlight. And he had pale white skin like the kind of skin that had never seen sunlight at all. I suppose that the fact is that it hadn't. He was always fully dressed in long pants and long sleeves, and I certainly never was aware of him ever going swimming or anything else outside.

He was a mechanic and was always in the garage or in his apartment. He was a motorcycle mechanic and worked for a local Harley Davidson shop. His hands were always a little bit dirty and a little bit greasy and a little nicked up from hitting some sharp edges. And, unlike the image of a Harley rider, he had no tattoos, just smooth, clear skin. But he wasn't a Harley rider. He couldn't afford one, he said. And he drove around town in an old pickup truck. Later he may have gotten his own bike, but not when I knew him. We were still pretty young. I was 28 then. I think that he was 25.

Black hair, dirty hands, and pale white skin – He would bare himself only to me. With the guys at the shop, he talked about his girl. But it was only me. I wasn't quite a virgin, though inexperienced, and he had been a virgin until we met. Then, we both worked on experience. We

would talk and snuggle and watch the night  
unfold together and try to learn  
whatever we could about how to be us.  
It was going pretty well until one  
night I told him that I loved him.

No need, here, to go into the details.  
It was a very sweet conversation:  
tender, caring, delicately sincere,  
affectionate for each of us. At one  
point he got out of bed and disappeared  
into the bathroom and returned completely  
naked (physically and emotionally)  
and slipped a man's gold ring with a one  
carat diamond onto my hand. It fit  
perfectly. He said no one had ever  
been so sweet to him or had said such things  
to him. He said he wanted me to have  
that ring. We snuggled some more, but there was  
nothing more to say. And with that ring around  
my finger, we fell into our sleeps.

That ring is still the only diamond ring  
that any man has ever given me.  
I wore it proudly for years, primarily  
on dress occasions – not for everyday.  
I sold it in my middle fifties  
when I went completely broke and pretty  
much had to sell everything to survive.  
I still think of it occasionally and  
wish I could wear it again and celebrate  
our first affair.

I stayed that night asleep, and in the morning  
he told me he was going to be gone  
for a few days and would tag back up with  
me on the weekend. I gave him a hug and a



kiss and went on my way. That weekend, his phone was unanswered, his apartment was empty, and the Harley shop said he'd gotten another job and left them.

I guess something had scared him. It might have been me. But it might have been any number of things.

We never really knew each other all that well. And now, I don't remember whatever else I may have learned from him: Only that we never really knew each other all that well.

I have recently been reading studies researching human promiscuity.

When I worked full time in AIDS Prevention, this would have been professional study and skill improvement. Now I suppose it's for the fun of it. But – I have learned some interesting things:

Most studies on multiple sex partners do not ask about the gender of them. They presume that heterosexual behavior is the norm for all men. And they presume that many (or most) women do like to have sex with other women sometimes.

None of the studies defined what sex was. It was left up to the participant to separate fore-play from 5-play and so on.

Most studies have found that the age of most promiscuous behavior is 18 to 29, after which people get married and only have occasional affairs outside of their marriages. They found most people (about 80%) are serially monogamous once past their 20s: one relationship after another.

Study participants generally self-reported that men have more sexual

partners than women do. Findings ranged from about 18 to 33 different lifetime sexual partners for men. And from about 4 to 12 lifetime sexual partners for women.

Researchers discarded the findings that men have more different partners in their lives than women do. They justified this action by saying they believed that men exaggerate their sexual prowess while women demur.

Both males and females reported lifetime virginity, but it was rare.

Both males and females reported lifetime monogamous relationships, but that was also rare.

Some people, mostly male, reported they had hundreds of lifetime partners. But the studies generally discarded those reports as lies since they would have skewed the data too much.

I found one study that said, candidly, that they considered any man who said he'd had over 100 different partners in his lifetime to be a complete anomaly or a liar. "If a man has had over a hundred different partners in his lifetime, he has had more sexual partners than anyone else!"

When I worked in AIDS Prevention, I met

several men who reported numbers of sexual partners in the thousands. They always made me feel like such a piker.

I deal in gold.  
I have spent my whole life in gold.  
People come to me who want the best  
because they know that I can find it.

People come to me because they want to  
buy the burial mask of a pharaoh.  
People come to me because they have the  
crown jewels, of some small royal family, that  
disappeared in World War 2 and need to  
sell them with no record and no taxes  
and no criminal charges.

I have friends who can pay prices that  
normal people cannot begin to  
imagine.  
I know how to have people disappear.  
I know how to make gold disappear. And  
when it reappears on the market  
200 years from now, I know that the  
very finest dealers, then, will suspect  
that it was my doing, and they will  
wonder how I did it.

I am no spring chicken, no naive brat,  
no, no, no, I am old enough to know  
better. But I am also NOT old enough to  
be a fool.  
I live on a small estate. And it is  
lovely and secured by my own little  
army of professionals.

When you arrived, two years ago,  
I wondered how you had gone unnoticed

by all of the other men, how you could have come to be mine.

I did not wonder how you could have penetrated my security. But I should have.

Perhaps I had become an old fool after all.

But you were so lovely to me:

So passionate with me;

So able to fade into the shadows

when I had work to do and

so able to light up any room when you returned.

And now, after these two elegant years of touching, you bring to me this trifle made of gold and ask me to sell it for you – without any questions, without any record, without any thought of my feelings or my reputation.

Just another unheard of deal.

I know every piece of gold that has ever been stolen or sold. That has always been my business. But I have never seen this piece before. And I know that it will be the biggest deal I have ever been a part of. But I also know that you have loved me for two years not because of love or even for taking advantage of my wealth and good fortune for your comfort and a life of ease, but so that I would take the risks of representing this deal rather than lose my days and nights with you. And I know that when I am done with this deal you will have no further use for me. You will thank your old fool and be gone.

But I will sell your gold for you.

Then I will live in my lovely little estate  
surrounded by my army of professionals.  
And I will wonder how you found me.  
(I will not wonder why you used me.  
That I understand.) I will wonder where  
you found this wonderful piece of gold.  
I will wonder why no gold dealer in history  
had ever seen it before.

But I will also know that future dealers  
will wonder how I found it and talk about  
the deal I made for it.

They will not know that I spent  
the rest of my life feeling like  
a prostitute in a backstreet market  
in Istanbul because it turned out that  
this lovely young man lay with me only  
to get my best services, and then left.

My grandsons are descended from immigrants from England, Germany, Holland, France and Spain. They are also descended from people who were living in this hemisphere before Columbus.

Their religious roots include the Catholic and Anglican churches and several other protestant churches and probably various “pre-Columbian” practices.

Ten generations back, they have a grandfather who arrived in Plymouth with the second boatload of Pilgrims. Other ancestors, here in America, were slave owners and murderers and hard working citizens – all kinds of people.

Various ancestors fought on both sides of the American Revolution and the Civil War. Still others fought in the Indian Wars, the Spanish American War, the Mexican American War, and World Wars 1 and 2. And some were Conscientious Objectors.

Although we could not probably trace any exact details, it is likely that other various ancestors fought in wars all across the history of Europe and the Americans all the way back to the Roman and Aztec Empires.

And so, they are Americans.



Beautiful morning for a walk.

A little chilly:

59 when I left the house

and 60 when I got back.

By late morning, it will be

top-down weather.

Thank you, that thing that runs the universe.

When I was sickly in December or January, I developed a very sore left shoulder and neck. I knew that it was from sleeping wrong, or too much, while not feeling well. But after I was better, the sore muscles continued. I went to my doctor and he sent me to a physical therapist and they said it had to do with slumping over too much while sitting or standing. My shoulder socket was not positioned correctly and I was straining my muscles etc.

Sitting here at the PC, doing some of the chair stretches they have suggested, and earlier while on my morning walk and rolling my shoulders to get them into "place" I was reminded that I am grateful that my parents are deceased and will never know that, at the age of 69, I had to go to Physical Therapy to learn how to, as they used to say, "Stand up straight!"

I can just hear her saying, even now, "Oh God! Oh God! Oh God!" I believed it was a prayer. And I believed it was a prayer of praise, of gratitude for all the kind things that life had brought to and shown to her. How could I have been so wrong? For now I am told it was her state of sin that called, in curses, the Lords name in vain, while in some evil ecstasy caused by human touching. I am told that she deserves some punishment for calling out to God while "in passion." I am sorry, brother, but I believe your interpretation of the scripture is wrong. It really was prayer.

I was there and saw it all. It was prayer of praise and gratitude for everything. And I am thankful that I was there, even if it was only in the guise of an angel of the Lord who was sent to remind her of the Joys of knowing God in all his mercy. (God the spirit, God the Father, and God the son, of flesh.)

I'm rapidly approaching my  
seventieth birthday, and I have been  
reviewing some of the high points of my life.

I have been lucky enough to fall in  
love with a few people. I first learned of  
love by having a child and being in  
love with her. Then, it spread around some.

I learned how to have relationships – both  
friendly and romantic. I had a pretty  
good career and accomplished some things  
of which I am truly proud. I got good  
enough at writing poetry that some  
people call me a poet. I made some  
terrible mistakes, but learned some things  
about how to repair the damages done.

For instance, I got clean and sober. I  
apologized and tried to clean up the  
messes and change my behavior. Although  
I still often have trouble believing  
it, I learned that it is not all about me  
and I am not in charge of anything.

I've tried to get my own way and, failing  
that, I've tried to be kind and helpful.

I've walked in the woods. In many different woods.  
I've walked along the lake. Many different lakes.  
And I've canoed and swam and skinny-dripped  
in some lakes and oceans and seas. I've stood  
atop some mountains – with snow and without –  
and looked out at the views or been surrounded

by clouds. I have visited some great cities.  
I have visited some very empty  
graveyards. I have stood upon soil that I  
was sure no one else had even seen before,  
only to find a rusty tin can under foot.

I have gotten laid repeatedly – though  
not enough. I have accepted propositions  
from some very pretty men. I have turned  
some down. I have been told I was the  
very best ever. And I have told that to  
another one or two. I have pushed my cum  
into vaginas and assholes and mouths  
and thin air. I have had others spray their  
cum inside of and on me as well. I have  
had one man give me a diamond ring.  
I've had other men give me a kiss  
on the cheek. I have snuggled while wearing  
long underwear and while wearing footy  
pajamas and while stone cold naked.  
I have been in orgies with too many  
men to count. As I have gotten older,  
I have gotten as confused by all of  
that as I was when I was only about twelve.

Although never very wealthy, I have  
had some great cars, clothes, guns, houses, vacations –  
and other toys and luxuries.  
They all were fun and meant virtually  
nothing in the fabric of life.

I have come to understand that it is  
all good – a good gift – to be taken and  
used and enjoyed and shared and then left  
behind for someone else to play with.

It is a gray morning. There are thick low clouds that look like rain is coming. But there is no rain yet. It is late spring and the trees are full of fresh young leaves. The shades of green are endless. And there are still flowers: All along the trail are blues and pinks and yellows and whites and purples dancing slowly in the morning breeze. I am not on a long walk – maybe 20 minutes, less than a mile – just enough to limber up and get my body moving. I hurt my knee and hip last week while moving things out of the house after the flood. I have rested them, and now it is time to exercise.

Resting on the petals of the flower,  
the butterfly seems still and at peace.  
I wonder though, this is making babies,  
There must be more passion than I can see.  
If the butterfly is so still, is the  
flower trembling with anticipation  
or is it just the little breeze that moves  
her about? Is the breeze what carries the  
passion? Would the flower move about some  
even on the stillest morning? Or is  
this Tantric pollination? Everyone  
is very still until it bursts out -

Whatever. It's still beautiful, and so  
colorful, and it will make next year's blossoms.

To lean in close enough to quickly sniff  
the side of your neck below your left ear.  
To quietly let you know how good you  
smell today and to smile broadly at your  
giggle back, knowing why and what I am  
doing: Rejoining the old time ritual  
of touching skin – but – this time not with  
anyone else: You. To lean back in close  
enough to touch your skin with mine but to  
stay back just a bit. The tip of my nose  
to not touch the side of your neck or the  
rim of your ear. Our hair to brush against  
each other's like leaves beneath the blooms, but  
not more. I will be back for you again.



In the afternoon, the rain stopped and the sun came out for a while. I went for a long walk down by the riverside. The park was busy but not full. People just had to get out of their houses and walk in the fresh clean air in the park. I sat on a park-bench looking out across the water and thought about how good my life has been. It has been very good. I repeatedly talk with others about what a lucky man I am.

Still, I have to admit that sometimes I wish I could be 15 again. I miss being young, and I'm having trouble adjusting to this old age thing.

But not on this bright clear afternoon: I was okay with myself and the world just as we are. Then there was a quick quiet shift that I had not seen coming. Suddenly all I wanted or needed was another long weekend in bed with several pretty young men who thought I was magnificent.

The madness was back. I am seventy years of age, and my body doesn't really work that well anymore. And, suddenly, I might as well have been 15 again. My skin was crawling with longing and loneliness and the fear that I would never get enough of anything:

Being 15 is worse than I remembered.

Sheldon would often cry a few moments after he had had an orgasm: Sometimes just a few brief moans with tears and catching his breath; Sometimes long, soft, sobbing – as if at the loss of the only thing that had ever really mattered to him.

I would always hold him for those minutes. Carefully. Gently. And without a word. Reassuring that it was all okay.

Afterwards he would be embarrassed. He would lie quietly and look away. Maybe he would fall asleep in my arms.

Once he told me that I was the only man who had not freaked out when it happened. The only one who would hold him. Most men didn't understand. Most men were upset and left when he was asleep and never came back. I replied that crying always seemed like a reasonable response to me. I didn't remember ever crying at my cumming. But why not? What else was there to do?

It is now after 1 AM.

I was awakened around midnight  
with a poem about an ex-boyfriend  
(who is now long dead)  
running in my head.

It is in a folder of my draft poetry now. I may work on it more later.  
And I am still awake in the darkness of the PC glow.

This old motel is filled with ghosts tonight.

If you ever wonder on the afterlife, come and visit here.

There is nothing to be afraid of.

It is always such a pleasure to see you.  
I love your smile and the sight of your skin  
and the way that you just about trip over  
yourself, like an excited little puppy,  
when you come to greet me and reach out for our  
first touch. I'm sure that you've noticed how happy  
we are to see one another again.

I love the taste of your glands and the way that  
you shudder against my lips and throat and lose  
your balance for a moment. I love the deep,  
dark exhale that you have. And I love our sigh.  
When you leave, there is always a part of me  
that I have freely given away and that  
will never come back. Ever. Until you do.

In the last weeks before my mother died, she told different members of the family about a specter that was visiting her occasionally. She said that she would waken to find a man standing on a flight of stairs at the foot of her bed talking to her about how it was time for her to come with him and move upstairs. She was in a nursing home and knew that the floor upstairs was for people with different medical needs and she couldn't understand who this man was or why he was trying to move her to a different level of care.

Many of my family members were aware of people having such visions before they died, and so we talked about it. She seemed to be disturbed by him bothering her. But we could see the end was drawing near.

I was surprised that she did not know the visitor. My experience with such visions has been that most people saw them as relatives or loved ones who had died before them. They talked of being visited by their mother or father or a grandparent: Someone they loved and had missed – someone who was welcoming them beyond life.

I was surprised that my mother saw a stranger.

It is my understanding that Carl Jung interpreted these experiences as

the dying person encountering who they wished they had been. Or who they truly were.

It was sad for me to think of my mother seeing herself, as she was dying, and not knowing who it was. It was also sad to think of my mother not having any loved one who could reassure her that it was okay to cross over into the afterlife. Talk about being alone.

But there was nothing I could really do about it. I asked her if she was sure she did not recognize him. She did not. I suggested she might ask him who he was. She didn't want to talk with him. She didn't like that he was in her room, though it wasn't a private room and she had wondered if he might really be talking to her roommate. But, of course, she wasn't about to meddle in her roommate's affairs either and ask her about it.

Mostly I left it alone and went out of my way to say, "Goodbye," each time I left her. Finally, she did die and the family went on to grieving and settling her estate (which was pretty easy since she really had almost nothing left). Since her death I have gone back to everyone on individual occasions and asked if they ever heard of an identity for this visitor. None of them did. So I have simply made peace with her. As one must. But I have also wondered once or twice who it is that might come to visit me on my deathbed. There are many

possibilities I believe. I have had  
a good life with loved ones and friends all about.  
But, I'm just going to have to wait and see.

I hope I not only know who is coming  
to welcome me into the afterlife,  
but that I also understand that  
that is what is happening to me and  
can go ahead cheerfully, and in peace.

When Bill lived in the old apartment on East 34th St, it already had a lot of history for me. Now it has even more.

The first time I was ever there, it was being lived in by a group of monks who had leased the entire building as their monastery. Their work was a combination of education and outreach to the streets. Some of them had jobs as teachers in the high schools or the college, but each of them walked the campus regularly looking to talk with young men and women who had lost their way and were living underground among the students. They would bring them home for salvation.

It was in the same apartment that Bill was living in that the monk named Brother Gregory got crab lice from my brother-in-law, Rick. Later, it was in that same room that Gregory and Rick and his girlfriend first had consecrated sex and she got up and left because it was all too weird. Rick stayed – looking for salvation. It was in that same room that the President of the College told me that everyone was sick and tired of my craziness and I needed to get some help.

I wouldn't have sex with him anyhow. But I did get into treatment. I did get help. Then, over some months, the monastery fell in upon itself and most of the brothers moved on to other projects. Brother Gregory



hanged himself in the apartment across the hall from the rooms that would become Bill's.

I no longer recall how I came to know Bill. But the first time he invited me to his home, I stood in the old rooms in wonder. How could this place still be? How could I have come back here? How could I be so different now? I was no longer so crazy. I was no longer looking for salvation.

Bill's apartment had bookcases on every wall with books all the way to the ceiling. All of the furniture was Stickley stuff. Stickley couch. Stickley chairs. Stickley bed, with a grandmother handmade bedspread on it. The windows were draped in sheer beige scrims. One could look out into the courtyard, but no one could ever see back in.

Way over a hundred years ago the place had been a stagecoach stop up to the north of town. That courtyard had been the walled in compound to protect everyone from Indians. Over time apartments were built and the courtyard became a very secret enclave that no one in the neighborhood ever knew was there. And no one could look into Bill's room from the space that no one even knew was there.

Bill was that private.

We dated well.

We laughed and had dinner and sat and

talked on the Stickleys. We showered together and slept together and held each other as much as we could – especially whenever Bill might be crying. Which was no problem.

We went out for dessert.

We went to parties with friends.

We visited with the neighbors.

We talked about poetry and painting and very good cars. I never did understand why he broke it off except that he wanted someone else instead.

After he killed himself I stood in the old rooms in wonder again. How could this place still be? How could I have come back here? How could I be so little different now? I talked with old friends about his death (and life). We had not failed him. He had just killed himself. That's all. Just like Gregory back in time across the hall – but without a rope and falling further and harder.

And I no longer drive down East 34th St.

Ever! That was my last time there. I am not going back.

I stood at the side of the bed for a few minutes trying to catch my breath. Mike asked if I were okay. I said I was. I was just trying to catch my breath. After a little bit, I did. And then I lay back down beside him. Being 70 is somewhat different from all the younger ages. But this was not the first time I have had to stand at the side of the bed trying to catch my breath. And I hope it will not have been the last.

I have the windows open.  
There is a very light cool breeze.  
It has almost stopped raining.  
There is still a little beat of rain drops falling.

In the distance, there is a rooster crowing.  
It's the first time I've heard a rooster in this neighborhood  
(about 17 years).  
I hope it stays.

It was on just such a day as this that we lay that time. In just such a wood as this. With sunlight through the bare trees on the ground just as this. You are no longer the lithe beauty that you were then. And I am no longer the cute young man that you knew. But, I love it that you asked for a new birthday suit from Santa this year, for your Christmas, because your old one was all wrinkled and did not fit well anymore. You may have been disappointed when he did not deliver it. But it's okay. Your old one is still in my mind. And I know that we put it to very good use.

I had to shoot a squirrel in my yard once. I lived way out in the country. Telling a neighbor, he wondered if it might have had rabies. So I called the county health office to report the incident and ask about it maybe having rabies.

The county officer listened to my story: I was sitting on my sofa reading, and all of a sudden it jumped onto the window screen behind me tearing at the screen and chattering loudly like it was screaming at me. I slapped at the screen with my book and it jumped back to the ground, still screaming, and ran off. I closed the window, but a moment later it was at another window yelling and clawing at the screen trying to get in. Then it was at another window and then clawing at the door – making quite a ruckus. Then it ran round to the back yard and began again. By this time I had gone into the bedroom and gotten my little 22 rifle and was headed for the back door. Once I got into the backyard, it stayed back from me but was running around in half circles like it was trying to corner me and chattering loudly and clawing at anything and everything. Finally it jumped into a tree and then onto a utility pole and, sitting, at the very top was still screaming at me and clawing at the pole. I was in a good position

for a shot and blew the top of his head off. His body fell to the ground and lay there motionless, with most of his head and brain gone. I buried him in the back field.

The health officer told me it probably wasn't rabies. We just hadn't had any cases in the area for years. Maybe East of us, but not here. He talked more about symptoms and behaviors and how we couldn't test for rabies since we didn't have the brain, and then said, "But I'll tell you one thing. That squirrel damn sure needed killing."