

## Walking in New Orleans

Years ago I was in New Orleans for a poetry reading, and my old friend Leonard and I spent a whole afternoon walking around town, talking about art and poetry and earning a living. Then we stopped for dinner at a Popeye's Louisiana Kitchen on Canal Street a block or so off of Bourbon. (I doubt that it survived the hurricane now. The hurricane took out almost everything. Leonard completely lost his home in the flooding. He wasn't even allowed to go back into the wreckage of his home for almost two years.) (His great line was, "This was no ordinary hurricane party.")

While eating Popeye's chicken and biscuits, and enjoying our friendship on that particular day, we watched a dozen or so young black men outside of the windows, on the sidewalk, dancing to music from a big Boom-Box.

Of course, they were all descended from the slaves, and they were now all poor free-men. But they were still as hard as rocks for working, and their dancing was as joyful and spontaneous as young men can be. They did not have a care in the world, and they were dancing: Everything was going to be alright.

I made some sort of comment to Leonard that the sight of them all dancing on the sidewalk, just outside of the window, was perfectly New Orleans. And he replied that that was why he had settled there. There was no other place like it in the world. (And he had been around the world a couple of times.)

We were not them. We did not understand them completely. But we knew that they were there, dancing, and everything was going to be alright.

I thought of them as holy spirits dancing outside of the window.

When Leonard died, I knew that he was gone,  
but that he was only just on the other side of some window.  
I could not see him clearly, but he was dancing.  
He was gone, but still, joyfully,  
just over there a little ways.

I do not understand the ether,  
you know, where the dead ones go to live.  
I suppose that none of us does. But  
it is clear to me that there is something  
going on.

I have been with many other people  
as they died. I have been next to  
too many other people's deaths  
to think that there are no angels  
coming down, in through the ceilings, to  
gather up the souls and fly away with them.

I have heard them.  
I HAVE almost SEEN THEM.  
I am certain that there is some sort of  
metamorphosis going on. And,  
just as I am sure that the caterpillar cannot  
and does not  
know how they are related to the butterflies,  
I believe that they have, undoubtedly,  
seen them flying by on the other side of that window.

They just don't understand what they are.

I don't understand what they are either.  
But they are there.

The angels fly past our senses  
whether we see them or not.

When the air is still and the light is dim,  
and we are alone in our room,  
the dead friends and loved ones are still adjacent to us.  
And if we will listen closely, they are dancing  
and constantly whispering that  
everything is going to be alright.