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**His 7 volumes of essays on social and political commentary, Sign Posts, are some of his reflections on cultural dissonance and harmony that inspire a critical look at the purpose of human life.**

**He lives with his wife in Arizona.**

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# **STEPPING STONES**

## **A COLLECTION**

**Don Davison**



# STEPPING STONES

A COLLECTION



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*A Logger's World*

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# STEPPING STONES

A COLLECTION

by Don Davison

Zirahuen Publishers

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A special thanks to Louella Holter.

And again –  
to Patricia for everything.





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<sup>1</sup> In a deviation from my other collections of poetry, all of which have “finding pieces,” the final piece in this collection is *The Ascent*. The piece affords the observation that the fundamental essence of the Rules given in *The Game of Life: A Player’s Manual* can be found in many texts. Two of my favorites are by St. John of the Cross: *The Dark Night of the Soul* and *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. I invite those who wish to enter the world of Christian Mysticism to read at least one of them.



## TENDER

Tender is the guard  
who wrestles from the wind  
the mistletoes of the storm.  
What great purpose awaits  
the captured essence of the sea?

## STARTLED!

While greeting the day in San Miguel,  
I find myself standing on the curb  
taking in the magnificent *Zócalo*.<sup>1</sup>

Then ...

a pigeon waddles amidst the throng  
across the street  
and climbs the stairs to the park.

I realize ...

It is home,  
another urban dweller –  
lost among the streets, parks, and roof tops  
of the city.

---

<sup>1</sup> The center square of a village, town, or city.

## NEVER JUST NOISE

The hammer strikes the anvil of my mind  
and the ringing  
echoes in the recesses of my memories  
from which I pull forth  
the essence of my presence.



## SEÑORA

Señora, tell me ...  
I walked by the old lady many times,  
in those few days spent in Puebla.  
She was always in the same spot,  
sitting in the same pose,  
creating her gastronomic delights.  
I wondered,  
as she laughed with her friends  
and turned with such deft loving care her creations,  
how many times had those old fingers  
touched the hot *comal*?<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A flat piece of metal, usually round, that one places over a small fire to cook on.

## TO SET THE FIRST STONE

To set the first stone of my life –  
of a life, anyone's life –  
that is the objective.  
To realize the difference between  
right and wrong,  
to think, to say, and then to do  
is the purpose of the species.  
To all those who know and do not do,  
I say this:  
You have failed yourselves,  
your loves, your offspring,  
your brothers and your sisters,  
the world/universe, and your God.  
One cannot just come to the party of life,  
one must become that exemplary piece  
of the great human tapestry.  
Our obligation is to witness and to act.  
For those who shrug their shoulders  
and raise an eyebrow, or two,  
for those who say,  
“I know it's wrong, but what can I do?”  
Take names! Describe deeds!  
Stand on street corners and shout!  
Join the ranks of the prophets of old!  
They did not shirk their holy calling.  
How can we do less and still be honest?  
Shoulder whatever truth  
destiny has graced you with.  
There is no other way.  
Fear not!  
Set the first stone!

TO THE MIME – AND ALL OTHERS

Is truth the same in any medium?  
The “t” at the beginning and near the end of “Truth,”  
is it the same for Tom and Tim?  
For Tim it’s terrible and tragic.  
His soul screams in sanguine sequences  
as he succumbs.  
Sharon’s shifting salutations serve severance.  
For Tom it’s terrific and tremendous.  
His soul sings in sanctification  
as he shares salvation.  
Sally’s sure they sense sweet serenity.

\*\*\*

Is this a true and doesn’t matter “t,”  
or is the “t”  
and its matter true in any case?



## TODAY

Having arrived in the twenty-first century,  
ensconced in the semi-freedom  
of the Web,  
many, too many,  
live their lives subjected  
to ad nauseam meals of media mist.  
From where comes  
the bedrock of our beliefs –  
if all we have in memory's bank  
are streams of haze?  
Days leave us dazed,  
living only in stupored time.  
Barely striding upright,  
we stagger along trails of forgotten beauty.  
Then,  
hurrying on to the next matinee,  
before the onslaught  
of the main attraction,  
having been told/shown by pundits  
and critics how wonderful,  
or awful,  
the presentation will be,  
we sag into cushioned oblivion.

With the flood of the advertising moguls'  
prophetic paid-for invectives  
slanting and spinning  
any semblance of truth,  
we supersized  
with popcorn and pop,  
while anxious fretting senses  
are assaulted by decibels  
and flashing lights  
beyond our ability to synthesize  
(that is, realize)  
that faster and louder  
only serve to cloud our waning abilities  
to remain connected  
to our self and others.  
What will tomorrow bring  
as the contemporary catharsis continues  
to wash away the temporal,  
leaving only grains of Time's sands?  
How will we feed the well of hope  
for our and our children's  
tomorrows?

WHAT IS THIS THING  
CALLED HISTORY?

What tracks of history do we make  
while we look for the tracks of history?  
One might say  
we are always looking for the tracks of fear.  
And yet –  
while looking we know we catch only glimpses.  
Most of history is unrecorded.  
As we stumble with this fact  
our picture becomes a blur  
of thises and thats.  
We paint our picture of recollected  
myths and legends –  
hearsay, for the most part – but not all.  
As we go about our tragic/comic dance,  
we invent our parts and color our futures.  
Always there has been this fear-drivenness,  
bouncing from disposition to false pride,  
as we embellished and selected  
our pedestals of time.  
They are always more than –  
always less than.  
We live encountering what we think  
could have been,  
should have been,  
and with that prideful hope,  
know it was.

We live (again) for the most part inventing  
even systems for remembrances.

The greatneses of our paths in time,  
the pettynesses of our heroics and our dallying,  
swim in a pool of memories  
while we go on about our lives  
leaving scuff marks along river banks,  
in valleys, on plains, and across mountains.

Then,

heaped stone, and now concrete,  
the former tantalizing our colored wonders,  
the latter dissolving and leaving  
heaps of ingredients.

All silting their way back into the indistinct,  
waiting, always waiting,  
for new beginnings.

Bless our efforts!

Forgive our hubris!

Hope for that shining star of integrity  
that catches, upon occasion,  
our furtive glances  
as we rush to births and pause at deaths.

## MUSIC OF THE SPHERES

“What are you doing?”

“Watching the snow fall.”

An interlude, words unspoken,  
silence passes  
broken only by the screeching, rushing,  
twisting wind.

Then again –

“Well, you haven’t moved at all.

Get up and do something!”

The snow kept piling up flake by flake.  
and I,

I listened with God’s ears  
to the crescendos of His infinitesimal orchestra.

Icy flakes crashing into one another  
as they careened and bounced into others.  
Scraping spurs of frozen crystals touched,  
and in that cacophonous symphony  
they slid and lodged next to each other  
finally coming to resting places.

The tomb of still white  
lays upon the whole of the earth  
shrouding and settling about each  
and every thing.

“Are you still watching the snow?

It stopped falling hours ago.”

My mind barely heard the voice.

I murmured,

“I’m still listening to the googolplex  
piece orchestra.”

Each flake's notes formed parts of  
arias and dirges,  
symphonies and concertos,  
sonatas and fugues.  
She interrupted,  
“Look, the snow is sliding off the skylight!”  
My eyes moved from window  
to that ceiling aperture,  
that blessed window to the heavens.  
Immediately my mind's eyes  
and my soul's ears  
were bathed in yet another opera  
of high-pitched notes  
as flakes' arms and crystals' edges  
joined each other  
in raking their way across the glass,  
stacking into a soft comforter  
blocking the view of branches and sky.  
They suddenly cracked apart  
letting the pine boughs  
laden with puffy mounds  
of brother and sister flakes  
dance to the Divine's cosmic and eternal music.  
They shared His themes  
echoing joy and sorrow,  
ecstasy and pain.  
As if cymbals broke their union,  
moans and cries, murmurs and rumblings,  
whispers and screams  
rushed into my consciousness.  
All these and more tugged at my soul's  
heart and bathed it in tears.

Meanwhile the “the others,” those tuned  
to Pregame Highlights of the NBA  
and CNN’s omnipresent parsing of the news  
as well as Talk-Show hosts’ ominous dissecting and  
resurrecting of yesterday’s topics –  
before something of interest happens today  
(after 12:00 noon – mornings are always  
given to yesterdays),  
they didn’t share in the early  
spring’s awakening.

But I,

I and my lady, my horse, my wolfdog,  
a host of birds,  
including North America’s largest song bird,  
a pair of ravens,  
we,  
all fellow attendees of the snowstorm,  
listened joyfully  
to the music of the spheres.



## THE ALL OF HISTORY

It was in the age of implosion.  
It was in the age of confusion.  
It was in the age of transition.  
It was in the age of transformation.  
It was in the age of the second great flood.  
It was in the age of the great drowning.  
It was in the age steeped in information.  
It was in the age of disinformation.  
It was in the age of the hominid's great loss.  
It was in the age of the hominid's great finding.  
It was in the age of right.  
It was in the age of wrong.  
It was in the age of the great fruition of relativity.  
It was in the age of black holes.  
It was in the age of accretion.  
It was in the age of the holographic.  
It was in the age of the electromagnetic pulse.  
It was in the age of fusion.  
It was in the age of entropy.  
It was in the age of looking out.  
It was in the age of looking in.  
It was in the age of life.  
It was in the age of death.  
It was in the past.  
It was in the future.  
And so, it was that here now, too,  
I am for me.

And yet,  
it is that here I am also for You.  
For the message says:  
“In Him, through Him, by Him”  
so that we all may live.  
We are Him and He is us.  
To know this:  
I must know me.  
I must know you.  
I must know Him.

## THE OLD SPIGOT

There was a leaking old spigot  
rusted and abandoned.  
The wilderness accepted its gift.  
The old pipe had been sunk  
into the bowels of the mountain  
eons ago.  
The spring from the depths of the stones  
provided needed repose.  
The crystal-clear droplets  
have been a part of the primeval forest's  
symphony since almost forever.  
The tiny life drops of water,  
that in their way to the damp humus  
sparkle with the whole spectrum,  
shedding its hopeful brilliance  
with the surrounding forest.<sup>1</sup>  
And I,  
lost, in the soft  
sounds of the slow dripping,  
find myself.

---

<sup>1</sup> This reminds me of the old authors who continue to share their distillations of the ages with the always new fertility of history.

ANGER ...  
WHOSE? FOR WHAT?

Verdant lateness casts its presence  
in vales and rills –  
reminding one  
of Nature's tracks across the landscape  
gently bumping into the vagaries  
of the mind's wanderings.  
And did you ever wonder  
of the mounting of your anger  
in the serenity of it all?

## THE PARTING

Into the grieving morass of the temporal,  
I sink into myself.

He is gone.

Our son.

We are left resurrecting memories  
of his presence.

Snippets of salutary moments  
spread a table of nourishment in his absence.  
Is there not some Christological beneficence here?

Are we not fed in the present  
by his having been an intimate part of our lives?

There is no other consequence but joy.

We move beyond faith and hope  
to be consummated in love.

We live now,  
with a never-ending  
thank you on our lips.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> We lost our son Keith Christopher Davison on August 19, 2019.

## THE WONDER OF SALVATION

The emergent common denominator of the species  
– how far back must we go to see, feel, and hear  
    that singular note,  
    that harmonic similitude?  
    The fracturing of globules  
    and the cementing of bits and pieces  
    to form a unique and yet the same  
    – at that close enough level –  
with sufficient time to allow for the next coalescence  
    – and then –  
    the undulating rhythms of directional time  
    create us as parts again, and again,  
    until we are someplace together  
    on the current curve of time.  
    How long,  
    how far away are we  
    from the new accretion of our being?  
How long before we will know when and where,  
    the wavering luminosity of Nature's efforts,  
    and humankind's reason,  
    will coincide often enough  
    in that beatific radiance  
    – repeatedly –  
    birthing a calm serenity of soulfulness,  
    lest we worry our way again  
    to war?

## ANGEL

Spin, angry angel, spin.  
As the prism's precious load  
flashes across golden hair,  
now flecked with gray,  
spin,  
spin away from the history of your pain.  
Spin in the splendor of your presence  
towards the all of your surrounds.  
Never let the "others"  
negate the beauty of your purpose.  
Do I finally know enough to own the truth?  
It is in your imperfections  
that I am caught.  
And while it is true  
that they don't counter balance the whole,  
they hide some of your magnificence.  
It is to that magnificence  
that I owe the most profound apology.  
I am sorry.  
You have expected that,  
you deserve that.



## JUST LUCKY

A father, a Forest Ranger!  
A mother, a Newspaper Office Manager!  
Small northern Wisconsin town!  
Raised in a Ranger Station!  
What delight!  
Caterpillar! Fire Trucks!  
Huge storeroom full of Tools!  
Yard of trees and grass!  
A Rain Gauge!  
Double deck birdhouse for Martins!  
Magnificent Lumberyard next door!  
A Flagpole!  
And I could raise the flag!  
Never-ending streams of people!  
Happenings!  
Hunting seasons! Trapping seasons!  
Forest fires!  
Lookout towers to climb up and race down!  
Mysteries of a Blacksmith shop  
across the road!  
Our school right behind the Station!  
Living on the shore of Lake Lucerne!  
Timber Ranch!  
Logged the maple, balsam, hemlock and oak!  
Cut and skidded aspen!  
With horses!

Old Railroad grades!  
Left tracks with canoe paddles  
between islands and along shores!  
Riley Springs!  
Played hockey on the ice!  
Football in the fall!  
A Sugar Bush!  
Maple Syrup in the spring!  
An older brother!  
A younger brother!  
Friends, yes!  
Someone mentioned Paradise once.  
I knew and understood.

## THE SMITHY'S SONG

Wrought –  
the bellows set the stage.  
Tongs place each sacrificial rod  
into the coals of the forge.  
When sufficient heat has turned  
the blue-black metal  
to the matching color of the glowing heat,  
it's taken from the red-hot bed  
and placed on the anvil of great purpose.  
His callused hand picks up  
the heavy hammer.  
A mighty arm guides blows  
meeting the template of the soul  
freeing a dream to fly off among the sparks.  
The morning's goal is met.  
Bang! Ting! Ting!  
Bang! Ting! Ting!  
Every so often,  
the creation is raised to the artist's eye,  
then dipped in the waiting trough of cold water.  
A rush of hissing steam issues forth  
as if some great monster  
is breathing in the dim light  
of the Smithy's holy shop.  
The staccato rhythms of the hammer and forge  
mix with the bursting steam  
creating a chorus  
that blends with the gentle  
whisperings of the day.  
All is well.

## ARREST ME

Snowflakes float about  
the blossoms of the fruit trees.  
The sun's rays dart in and out  
of the shifting holes in the clouds.  
I wander in my office  
from writing to reading,  
not knowing  
where I should spend my next moment.  
Unable to maintain my focus  
as it bounces back and forth  
from flake to thought,  
I say,  
"Still my presence!  
Hold my thoughts!  
Guide me to that gift of effort  
that leads me to myself.  
Quiet my throes  
of musings, feelings, and movements.  
Let me see, feel and hear  
Your Divine Presence  
in my space."

## BAND-AIDS

There are those days when  
(and before)  
I start reflecting on what I have done  
– and should do  
when I feel like I have accomplished too little.  
Then I feel the prick  
of a small cut on my finger,  
vaguely I recall the when of it.  
I dab on some disinfectant  
and reach for the box of BAND-AIDS.  
In opening it I find few left.  
The truth presents:  
I have indeed done a few more things  
than I can remember.  
Suddenly I feel much better  
– well –  
somewhat better about myself.

## BEWARE THE GAWKERS

Stupefied,  
they stand and stroll  
amidst the human rabble.  
Inoculated with a passivity  
that fosters crowds of do-nothings  
in the face of life's great gifts –  
which always cry out,  
“Do something right!”  
Something that fosters love,  
demanding the heart's attention.

## HOME

In the mirror of life itself,  
    beholding unto it,  
we blossom and we fester.  
We agonize and we are blessed.  
    We live always in the  
    reverberating luminosity  
    of being an "I am!"  
    From particle and wave,  
    in the undulations  
    of the push and pull of gravity,  
we are all held as souls of selves  
who think, say, and do with some sense  
of a purpose belonging to a whole.  
    We form and disintegrate,  
    remaining always who we are.  
    And if it is one,  
we live wanting to know and to feel,  
to hear and to understand:  
    "Welcome home."



## LIFE'S SACRED ASPECT

In the face of death there is that orgasmic push,  
a thrownness  
that offers opportunities to wonder,  
to grope, to need, to touch, to hope,  
to catch ourselves.  
From blundering flashes to shadowed presences,  
in synclines of stacked cells  
hovering at the cliffs' edges of synapsed space.  
We gallantly hang on to our known selves  
refusing not to believe  
that in the unknown effervescence,  
we share in the Divinity's sacred mission:  
Bringing more life to light.  
All the while  
hoping that enough sperm is cast and caught  
that there will be one  
to give birth to another who will know,  
again,  
the hallowed journey into self,  
a self that always seeks another.  
"Ella, ella una y quay ... "  
She, she unites to crack the darkness with the light  
so that we may see.  
"Ello, ello una y quay ... "  
He, he unites to crack the darkness with the light  
so that we may see.  
I live to exercise the needing  
of a seeking in the soul.

---

<sup>1</sup> See both phrases in "Windspeak" in *Murmurings: A Collection*, by Don Davison.

Knowledge is birthed from friction's heat  
so that we may be consumed  
in throes of life's intent.  
What to call God –  
when God is everything?  
Tympanums!  
I live to strike a hollow that gives a rhythm  
to our soul's dance.  
Empedocles,  
you still stand thresholding the eternal twins  
of love and strife.  
May I know the one to embrace the other.

PATRICIA

I can't imagine living life without you.  
Your strength of presence,  
your committed purpose,  
has given me those nudges,  
and sometimes a good shove,  
to keep me going.  
Thank you for being all that you are.  
I try to love you in my  
stumbling, bumbling, odd way  
and can only marvel  
at your patience with me.  
Please don't give up.  
I'm still learning.  
My hope is that the journey continues  
all through eternity and beyond.  
You are my other half,  
without which,  
I could never be whole.  
I love you.

RIGHT THIS MINUTE

More often now,  
I find myself standing on the cliffs of time  
facing the eternal headwinds  
of the encirclement  
of the Divine's hands.  
My breath is caught.  
I'm all in.

## SEEKING

I am an “I am!” –  
an encrusted barnacled sloop  
carrying wayward thoughts through  
a firmament of forever.  
We all think the muse whispers  
in our ear and mind,  
combining self to nature and to our kind.  
What feral searching leads us  
to those foreign shores,  
where we wander  
seeking the Divine?  
Are we the no-thing of the journey,  
or a speck of a comet’s trail  
leaving us nowhere to be found?  
Or, perhaps,  
it is that Michelangelo touch  
spreading a vast display  
that shudders through our common thread  
leaving us to the dead,  
and all we worship and all we dread?  
Or, to the bed  
where we depart on ways  
that seem but golden paths of eternal time?

## SNAP SHOT

I write to another truist who says,  
“Write another book.”

From one to one,  
I live and die into the  
simultaneity and reciprocity  
of it all.

While head and heart  
are caught in a mobius strip,  
hands hold it  
to stop the flailing mind  
and give to heart that tiller of the soul  
to own the wind  
and set a course towards true.  
Truth that is that everlasting  
push and pull  
of yes,  
becomes my only goal.

## STAGING

As a coherent history of humanity's efforts  
wobbles on and off its course,  
we struggle against fact and fiction.  
As the reciprocal of both bleeds into  
a communal chalice,  
we hunt in an existential sea  
for islands of rational efforts  
that compliment  
the very nature of a species.

## STILLNESS PRAYER

In the stillness of the early morning,  
before the hustle and bustle  
of the day becomes manifest,  
one should be still and reflect.  
“It” is here that all things lie,  
waiting to be discovered  
and taken into the heart.  
It is here that the pumping takes and puts  
the life of love on display  
so that it can be expressed  
in all we say and do  
in the trappings of the day.  
Thus,  
we maintain our freedoms  
of thinking, saying, and doing,  
with an integrity of soul  
that bespeaks our very nature:  
To honor the actuality of our presence.  
May God bless our mornings.



## THE BEAUTY OF WISDOM

Standing tall and thinking,  
saying, and doing something  
that is  
(in itself true)  
corroboratingly true by most  
– and yet can't exist  
except in that moment of passing through the vortex  
from yes to no and the reciprocal of no to yes.  
We see a good,  
not a bad  
and always wonder  
in our clumsy way  
of a truth that we believe is eternal,  
that loops back  
through personally acquired experience  
(life itself)  
forming a frame of reference  
to “judge” the wonderful new information  
that comes as an interruption  
in the eternal change of time  
bringing more successions of yesses and nos  
followed by  
that ever-existent intrusion of wonder.  
I live. I live.

## THE MOMENT

When we watch a wind-driven snow  
fall flake by wandering flake,  
it's senseless to think  
those individual little frozen stars  
will sift and interlock their starry arms  
to join in a thick white blanket  
covering all the tombs of souls  
left to mark their passing.  
But they do!

## WALLOWING PENDULUMS

Transitional cultural values  
slow, rapid, the speed of e-  
take us at a quantum leap to another place  
where perspective is different, disoriented.  
We live searching for an understandable context.  
Yet,  
as all things move,  
we still seek some point of contact  
with a known perspective:  
History is always hidden in the present.  
We move towards it quietly,  
hesitatingly, straight,  
or circumspect fully,  
trying to avoid too fast, too science  
(the thought of the learned ones, the professionals).  
The unknown of change cannot,  
in the uncertainty of time,  
follow a wallowing pendulum  
seeking to track truth through the rivers  
of emotions surging and running in their sinuous paths  
to the sea of forever.

## WHISPERINGS

I hear  
the ephemeral whisperings of soul strings  
moved by the Master Conductor.  
They pull me from my doldrums.  
Suddenly,  
I am swept up  
feeling the loving presence of all things  
as they labor in the vineyard  
of the Father.

## WONDERMENT

Did you ever touch a new oak leaf,  
uncurling in the dawn of spring?

Make a note:

“Do it soon!”

And ponder just how  
the soft little curled furry fuzzy  
gentle baby leaf  
makes the hard bold heart  
of the great sturdy oak.

## YESES AND NOS

From day to day the shades of gray  
grow darker and darker.  
Is it the season's length of day,  
or another purpose along the way?  
It could be the weariness of age,  
or maybe just another stage.  
Who is to tell  
when yonder bells toll their final ring  
and in that basket of our memories sing.  
What catches our soul string  
that ties us to our real selves?  
In any case,  
it is always that choice of one  
to attempt to see the light or dark.  
The frills of life are gone  
nothing's left but stark.  
And have we practiced  
a diversion of reflections  
that feeds a wondering mind's selections?  
From aspirations to depressions,  
as the life span runs its course,  
– from bad to worse –  
– from good to best –  
we choose to see our kaleidoscope  
of yeses and nos.

And yet,  
in that sine wave of our movement,  
we are always left a final “Yes!”  
that greets our last breath.  
We live always knowing  
we are forever walking  
towards the door of death.  
For us,  
the Holy comes from before,  
in the now,  
and will come after  
– reveries of the past –  
which will become the Holy past.  
And so, it is,  
I recall again that ancient prayer:  
“As it was in the beginning,  
is now and forever shall be.”

## TRAILS IN THE WOODS

Trails in the woods  
of the vast landscape of the Internet,  
lead those intrepid souls  
who choose to search the wilderness of the heart  
and periphery of the common fare,  
– those tracks of leading edges  
and historical significance –  
where they can find the information  
that informs twenty-first century minds.

They are those who are creating  
more new mega-molecules  
of fellow travelers.

They are those who recognize  
the fertility of greater truths.

Blessed are those searching souls  
who find and share  
from those trails in the woods,  
that lead to those ever-increasing mega-molecules  
of truth-seeking fellow hikers.



## WHO IS THIS?

How is it that we still feel like  
we need to introduce ourselves  
to God?

Is it,  
that we feel locked into our “I”  
and cannot free ourselves  
without His intervention,  
when He knows it all anyway?

Or,  
is it that we know  
we need to converse with Him,  
to really feel an integrated self  
that belongs to Him?  
As intergalactic swirls of smoke and dust  
and light  
grab our intermittent attention,  
we gasp in awe,  
dumbstruck at the majesty of it all.  
And then,  
we think of death and wonder  
what it has in store for us.

## WOOF AND WEAVE

The woof and weave of the human blanket,  
the blanket of personhood,  
a hood of many small holes.

We fixate on the holes  
and forget the time-consuming practice  
of mending one hole at a time,  
one thought, one word, one action.

The human template remains the same.

The choice is always to start,  
again, and again.

Choose! Choose! Choose!

ONE MUST BE BEFORE THEY CAN BELONG  
– ONE MUST BE A SELF

Beware some of the youth of every generation:

They portend trouble.

Energetic in their myopic flamboyance,  
mirroring live-streamed everything,  
they craft shallow ponds of indifference  
in the face

of the accumulated wisdom of time.

They spend almost no moments  
reading and reflecting.

They simply mime  
in studious gesticulations of absurdity,  
becoming the seeds for mega-molecules  
of the small hoards of the day.

In “belonging” to something,  
they follow the primitive instincts  
of groupiness

as they stuporously dance around  
the flames of destruction.

## A GLANCE

The mirror of the past  
always hangs unbroken  
in the memories of our journey.

Oh!

there are those silvered edges  
and a few spots here and there  
but there it hangs.

Nevertheless,  
we should, upon occasion,  
stop and reflect  
on the indisputable truths of history  
because there they stand,  
giving us that opportunity to exercise  
a humble heart and mind.

That is,  
if we can gain access to them both  
at the same time,  
and tear the self  
from the frenetic pace  
of the unknown next slip.

Linger in a cadence or full-stop  
and reflect upon the difference of our thinking:  
That was naive, blind, confused,  
with the apparent strength  
of a momentary current  
just before it hits another boulder  
and splits into infinitesimal shards,  
only to reunite somewhere down stream  
in the same water of the past.

Take another look into that mirror  
and question the accumulated hubris  
of ignorance and bow your head in prayers  
acknowledging the greatness of our God  
and the softness of His Touch.

PART 2  
LARGER STONES

## A SEASON'S GIFTS<sup>1</sup>

### PRELUDE

It happened that my grandchildren asked me, “What does Grun Grumpa and Grun Gruma want for Christmas?”

Off handedly, I answered, “Something they both need.”

“And what is that?” they asked.

Pulled from my reverie of four generations of tears, ticklings, tales, and images of the Old Ranger’s cancer-wracked body, I said, “Let me think – so many things . . .” Then drowned in years and awash with memories and moist eyes, I finally said, “Grun Grumpa needs to pile firewood again and Grun Gruma needs to lovingly watch him do that.”

Brenden, Katherine, Kristen, and Jakey all looked at each other and silently walked away.

### THE FIRST MOMENT OF CHRISTMAS

Brenden said, “Grun Grumpa is sick you know.”

“Yes!” Katherine added, “And we have to think about this a lot. What can we get them for Christmas?”

“Yes!” confirmed Kristen. “It’s very important.”

“Very important!” Jakey murmured.

Walking away in single file, Brenden said, “Let’s go look at Grun Grumpa’s piles of firewood by the Old Shed on the other side of the Old Logging Road.”

They all started to cross the Old Logging Road when both Brenden and Katherine said, “Be careful! We have to look both ways!”

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<sup>1</sup> For the grandchildren – so that they never forget.

They all scampered across, and running up to the piles, Katherine shouted, “Wow! He sure piled a lot of firewood in those piles!”

Kristin observed, “He sure did! And he put every piece so neatly on the pile.”

“He wouldn’t be able to do that now,” Brenden said. “Because he is sick.”

Meanwhile Jakey took a piece of firewood off the pile and immediately got stuck with a little sliver. As his yowl was dying Katherine ran over and pulled it out of his hand. “It’s nothing!” she said.

“Yeah! It’s nothing!” Kristen repeated.

“Nothing?” Jakey mused.

“I have an idea,” Brenden said thoughtfully. “Let’s go up the hill and find one of Grun Grumpa’s secret small piles of firewood and bring back some little logs for him to exercise with so he will be able to pile firewood again.”

“That’s a great idea!” Katherine shrieked. “Come on, let’s go!”

“Let’s go!” Kristen repeated again approvingly.

Jakey, holding his little hand and looking at the little spot where he had pricked himself, followed along behind.

## THE SECOND MOMENT OF CHRISTMAS

“We’ll never find any,” Kristen whined.

“We just have to keep looking. I know they are here someplace,” Brenden said thoughtfully.

“Yes, they are here someplace,” Katherine added.

“Yeah!” echoed Jakey emphatically.

In single file they marched up the hill and down the Old Logging Road searching for Grun Grumpa’s secret small piles of firewood. Finally, they moved to each side of the Old Logging Road, Katherine and Kristen on one side and Brenden



and Jakey on the other. They plodded along, peering into the deep dense hardwood forest.

### THE THIRD MOMENT OF CHRISTMAS

“Look! I found a pile!” Katherine shouted.

“Over here! Over here!” shouted Kristen.

“Yeah! Over here!” Jakey shouted too.

Brenden ran over and picked up two small logs and said, “Yes! This is exactly what we need for Grun Grumpa.” They all started running back to the Old Ranch House.

Suddenly Brenden stopped and said, “These are rough and Grun Grumpa won’t like to practice piling them with his Old Tired Hands. They would hurt him.”

“What can we do with them?” Katherine asked.

“We can wrap an Old Sock around them,” Kristen said thoughtfully.

“Yeah, an Old Sock,” Jakey confirmed.

“That wouldn’t be a good idea,” Brenden scoffed.

“Why not?” asked Kristen.

“It would just fall off, Kristen,” Katherine said critically.

“We need to make some smooth handles for Grun Grumpa.” Brenden said thoughtfully.

### THE FOURTH MOMENT OF CHRISTMAS

They were all sitting on a Big Old Log thinking when all of a sudden an Old Black Bear walked up and said, “What’s the matter?”

The children all jumped up. Katherine screamed. Kristen covered her eyes and so did Jakey. Brenden muttered hesitatingly, “Who are you? Bears can’t talk.”

“Why sure they can,” Old Bear said. “They just don’t do it very often. So . . . What’s the matter?”

The four little children gathered around the Big Old Bear and Brenden said, “We need to make some smooth handles on these little logs. They are for Grun Grumpa to practice piling firewood again.”

“Who is this Grun Grumpa?” asked Old Bear.

“Our Grun Grumpa, he lives just over there,” Katherine said, pointing towards the Old Timber Ranch Headquarters.

“Oh,” responded Old Bear. “That’s where the Old Ranger lives. We all know about him. We’ve been watching him for years. He is Very Old now like some of us. I, myself, am called Old Bear.”

“And he is sick now,” added Kristen.

“Sick!” Jakey said.

“He is? We haven’t seen him around lately,” said the Old Bear, scratching his head. “Sick you say?”

“Yes!” Brenden said. “And we are trying to give him something he really needs for Christmas.”

“Well now that’s a right fine idea,” said Old Bear. “Let’s see what this is all about ... smooth handles you said?”

“Yes!” Katherine said. “Grun Grumpa can’t lift heavy logs anymore and these are too rough for his Old Tired Hands.”

“Too rough you say?” said Old Bear, taking one of the little logs in his Big Old Paws. “Why yes, they are a little rough. The Old Ranger, sick you say?”

“Yes, and we want to give him something he really needs for Christmas,” Kristen added.

“Humm ... well let’s see now ... I know what we could do! Old Bear said quickly. We just have to find Old Castor the Old Beaver; he could make nice smooth handles in just a few minutes.”

“That would be wonderful!” Brenden said.

## THE FIFTH MOMENT OF CHRISTMAS

“Where do you think Old Castor is?” asked Katherine.

“Well, the last time I saw him,” Old Bear recollected, “he was getting ready for winter over at Old Pondevron. Let’s go over there and see if we can find him.”

The children all agreed, and along with Old Bear, off they went. Finally, they arrived at the Old Dam and looked out at Old Pondevron and saw it was all frozen over.

“What are we going to do now?” Brenden said.

Old Bear offered, “We’ll just get a stick and rap on the ice and Old Castor will hear us and come to one of his breathing holes.”

The children looked around and all found little sticks and began tapping on the ice. They tapped for some time and nothing happened.

“He’s not here,” Jakey said.

“What will we do if he is not here?” Kristen moaned.

“He has to be here,” Brenden uttered hesitatingly.

“Well, no, not necessarily,” Old Bear said, scratching his head. “Sometimes he goes off and visits his Old Friends.”

“What will we do if we can’t find him?” Katherine asked.

“I ... well ... you know maybe we could find Old Porky. He could cut those handles for you,” Old Bear offered gently.

“Okay,” Brenden said. “Let’s go!”

## THE SIXTH MOMENT OF CHRISTMAS

“We’re not going to find him,” said Jakey.

“We just have to keep looking,” Kristen said. “Isn’t that right Brenden?”

“Yes, that’s right,” Brenden confirmed.

“Hey! Look over there!” Old Bear exclaimed.

“Where?” asked Katherine. “I don’t see anything.”

Old Bear smiled. "Up there! Up there!" he said, pointing to a Big Old Hemlock. "Old Porky is always up there in the winter."

The children all looked up into the branches of the Big Old Hemlock and suddenly Jakey shouted, "There he is! I see him!" They all looked in the direction of his little pointing finger and there he was, Old Porky.

"Old Porky, come on down from there!" Old Bear called out.

"What for?" called down Old Porky.

Old Bear explained what was going on and Old Porky clambered down the Big Old Hemlock and said, "The Old Ranger you say he is sick, huh?"

"Yes!" Brenden said. "And we want to give Grun Grumpa and Grun Gruma something they really need. Can you help us?"

"Sure, he can," Old Bear declared, and turning to Old Porky he said, "You can gnaw some nice handles on these two pieces of firewood. It wouldn't take you too long at all."

"Be glad to," said Old Porky. "The Old Ranger you say? We haven't seen him strolling through the forest lately. I'll be glad to give you a hand."

Old Bear took one of the little logs and held it for Old Porky to gnaw on.

## THE SEVENTH MOMENT OF CHRISTMAS

Old Porky worked away and had already outlined both handles when he said, "Old Castor wasn't home you say?"

"Well, he may have been sleeping but we sure tried to get him to come out and help," said Brenden.

"I sure could use some help to get these handles finished and nice," Old Porky lamented as he started to chew away on the little logs again. Then he paused and said, "Old Castor could leave these handles real slick you know."

“I’ll go back and try again to see if I can get him to come out,” Brenden offered, as he took off running.

“I’ll go along with you,” said Katherine quickly.

## THE EIGHTH MOMENT OF CHRISTMAS

As Katherine and Brenden hurried along the Old Logging Road, an Old Raven swooped down and said, “What are you two little rascals doing all alone out here in the forest?”

Panting, Brenden and Katherine stopped and breathlessly said, “We are looking for Old Castor.”

“Ah-ha,” said Old Raven. “Old Castor might have wandered over by McAlpine’s. He goes upstream every now and then.”

“Can you show us where that is?” Brenden asked.

“Sure!” Then he added, “They call me Old Raven. The Old Ranger, sick, well I’ll be ... he has been wandering around in these woods for nigh on to ... let’s see now ... 60 some years, or so, I think.” He added. “Why are you looking for Old Castor?”

As they followed Old Raven, they explained their search for the little logs and what they were up to and why they wanted to find Old Castor.

## THE NINTH MOMENT OF CHRISTMAS

Just then a Big Old Buck stepped out into the middle of the logging road and said, “Old Raven, what are you doing with these little children?”

“Old Buck! I’m sure glad to see you,” said Old Raven. “We’re on our way to find Old Castor; the little ones are on a mission.” He then explained their need and what they were trying to do.

Old Buck said, “Old Castor was here but he went back to Old Pondevron yesterday. The Old Ranger, sick ... he

hasn't been sick a whole day in his life. What's the matter with him?"

"He has cancer now," Brenden said quietly.

Katherine added, "And he can't come outside anymore now."

Old Buck was thoughtful for a moment then he said, "I'll trail along with you and Old Raven. I'm sure Old Castor is at Pondevron. These woods won't be the same without the Old Ranger. He has lovingly cared for them and groomed them for many, many years."

### THE TENTH MOMENT OF CHRISTMAS

As Brenden, Katherine, Old Buck, and Old Raven headed back to Old Pondevron they passed by the plantation and Brenden asked, "How did all these pine trees get here?"

Old Buck's eyes lit up and he said, "The Old Ranger, the man you call Grun Grumpa, your Grumpa, and your uncle Mikus planted all of them. That was a long, long time ago. Your uncle Peter has a plantation now on the hill next to the Old Logging Camp site. This is one of the Old Ranger's favorite places. There was an Old Logging Camp here many years ago and I think the Old Ranger liked to walk along the Old Railroad Grade and imagine he was back in those times when the Old Loggers were cutting the Big Timber. There are still some of the Big Old Stumps scattered hereabouts that are taller than you are and as big around as you are when you are lying down head to toe."

Brenden looked at Katherine and said, "That would be a really big tree wouldn't it?"

"It sure would!" Katherine confirmed excitedly.

## THE ELEVENTH MOMENT OF CHRISTMAS

As they came up over the hill Brenden and Katherine saw Kristen and Jakey along with Old Bear and Old Porky coming up to the Old Dam at Old Pondevron. Brenden shouted, “Here we come, and we have some friends with us!”

When they finally grouped up at the Old Dam and introductions had all been made, Old Buck said, “Old Castor has to be here. He left McAlpine swamp yesterday. Let’s all rap again and see if we can get him to come out.”

They all gathered up sticks and tapped on the ice together and shouted in chorus to Old Castor, “Come out, we need your help!”

Suddenly a Big Old Reddish Brown Head popped out of a breathing hole and said, “Hey! What’s all that racket about out here?”

“We need your help,” Brenden said.

“What for?” Old Castor asked.

Katherine rapidly told Old Castor about their situation and their current dilemma.

“The Old Ranger you say? ... do tell. I haven’t seen him standing on the Old Dam surveying his handiwork for some time now. Sick you say?”

“Yes!” Brenden answered, “And we really need your help, or we won’t get our present ready in time for Christmas.”

Old Porky added, “Come on Castor ... I’ve got a good start, but you could give them a really nice fine finish.”

Old Castor climbed up out of his breathing hole and waddled over and said, “Let’s see now ... Porky you did a really great job outlining these handles. Let me see what I can do to smooth out those middles.”

In just a few minutes Old Castor had them all done.

## THE TWELFTH MOMENT OF CHRISTMAS

All the great grandchildren thanked Old Bear, Old Porky, Old Raven, Old Buck, and Old Castor and they said they would never forget their help on this very special Christmas.

Old Bear said, "You tell The Old Ranger that we will all be waiting here in the spring when he comes to make his rounds."

"Yes!" said Old Porky, "We'll all be here."

"And I'll be at Old Pondevron," added Old Castor.

"The plantation and its surrounds will be where he will find us," chimed in Old Buck and Old Raven.

The children thanked them all and ran down the Old Logging Road to the Old Timber Ranch Headquarters. Upon arrival they all burst through the door and said excitedly, "Grun Grumpa and Grun Gruma look! We have what you both need for Christmas!"

They handed the little logs to them and said, "Merry Christmas!"

Grun Grumpa and Grun Gruma stood with moist eyes surveying the assemblage, to the fourth generation, and said, looking at each other, "This is the most wonderful Christmas of all. We thank you so very much. You are all so wonderful and we are so blessed."



## EPILOGUE

It has been reported by many over the years since that Christmas of '02 that the Old Ranger and Old Franny D have been seen every now and then in the spring, walking hand in hand among the Trilliums and the Dutchman's Britches as well as in the summer strolling along the verdant Old Logging Roads and also in the fall with cap and gloves looking for Old Partridge and again in winter, before the deep snows come, trudging along the Old Logging Roads by McAlpine's Camp all bundled up against the cold, reconnoitering their beloved Old Timber Ranch.

## REMEMBERING

E. E. "Dave" Davison, "Ranger Dave," March 31, 1911 – February 9, 2003.

Frances Marie MacFarlane Davison, "Queen of Lake Lucerne," September 23, 1914 – October 22, 2014.

## WHEN? WHERE? WHAT BATTLE?

The young Knight stood steadfastly in the reeds as the waves whipped at him next to the edge of the river – the river of life. He waited for his Lady. She had ignored him for many days as she swam in the river and tried slowly to kill herself. He would not move except to tell her that he loved her and to start living for herself and her Children.

Cold winds swept the waters and the Knight stayed day after day night after night. There was only one purpose – to protect life itself. He would not leave his appointed task even when memories of former licentious times drifted through his mind. He fought them back into a place of meaningless nothingness.

Now there was no pain. There was no suffering. There was only the Lady, the Children, and the Truth. There was no round table, there were no friends, there was no rest, there was only the beauty of life. And the Knight stood still in the shadows of each failing sunset, fed only by an immortal faith. And the Lady maintained her course of destruction and abandonment.

There was nothing she could see as the moon rose and the stars graced the sky and the gentle sounds of the quiet time enveloped the Knight and the Children. The Lady screamed, “Get away from me! Why are you here?”

“Because we love you,” he said gently, “And because you are so beautiful.”

She slowly turned and said, “Why me? I am not pure. I am not holy. I am not honest.”

The Knight simply responded, “You are my Lady, and I will always love you.” Again, she screamed and vanished into the waters of perdition.

Her Children stood alone on the bank of the river of life, waiting and wondering. The Knight said, “She will return. Take care of yourselves and I will watch and wait.” The snows

came, and the water began to freeze and still the Lady would not return. And still the Knight stood in the reeds of the icy water and waited as droplets of frozen mist congealed on his beard and crystal tears clung to his face. The children fed themselves and took care of each other and waited on the banks of the river, the river of life.

Time passed, and the river of perdition raged as the Lady moved from vice to vice, running from wounds that would not heal. She continued to deny the truth of self and refused the care of those who loved her. Every now and then she would look at the bank of the river, the river of life, and wonder why they waited for her – the Knight and her Children.

Others asked her why she moved and stayed in the waters of sin. She cast back, “It is none of your business. What right do you have to berate me?”

They said, “You have not the knowledge of the Holy Truths.”

“I pray, and I know my truths. I pray! I pray!” she shouted.

“They are but shadows of the Truth,” they said. “You must stop running and see the beauty of the real truth of yourself.”

“I hate you! I hate you!” she wailed, “Get away! Go away!”

The Lady went and hid in the deepest part of the river and the Knight stood silently in the reeds, waiting, and the Children continued to grow on the banks of the river, the river of life.

Time moved across the heavens and the Mighty Lord sent His Angels to calm the water. Then the Lady saw the heavens in the mirror of the deep and she came to know the Truth and she moved from the depths of perdition and she came close to the young Knight and said, “I am ready, I will come home.”

The sun gave light to the faded flowers and the birds sang for the Children. The Knight's heart, fed only by faith and dedication to purpose, warmed in the cold waters and he said slowly, "I love you, my Lady."

The Lady came out of the water and gave herself to the warmth of the Knight's love, her Children, and the Mighty Lord's Will.

Then the Spring of Life came to smile on the Lady, the Knight, and the Children. The gentle wind brought echoes of ancient voices from the ruins of the old monastery high on the hill. Celestial hymns floated across the still land and the waters of the river – the river of life. A message of hope filled the land.

The Old Knight remembered.

The Old Monk listened.

The Ancient Parchment held safe the telling words.

FAITH & TIME  
HOPE & PAIN  
CHARITY & TRUTH

Light flickered in the ancient chapel as candles sent heaven's way supplications of the weary. A solitary form with shawled shoulders and bowed head knelt motionless before the musty sanctuary, sharing sorrow's heavy weight. "Father, keep him from all harm and bring him to Thy Light." A whispered loving prayer left soft lips and drifted into the evening's sighs.

A life was hanging in the balance. It was a time between heaven and hell, a time that held a promise for love and family. Days were spent waiting and watching, wondering and worrying. Would the pain of the Truth become too much and crush all hope? Where was he? What was he doing, was he caught in the currents of the underworld, or worse – was he dead?

Days of youthful strength were dissipated, and a purpose had been lost. Silence and pain were all that remained to the soft underside of memories left from earlier days.

She recalled sunsets and moon rises, scents of misty mornings and spring. They had followed a path shared by surefooted youthfulness and hearts that saw only the Light of Truth. Where? What? He's gone! Deeds done and lives lost. Histories were now all written with the blood of others.

There, in a quiet little room, a child and her loom. No! But wait! Why those tears on tender cheeks, from whence the pain? Slender fingers grip tightly the missalette, then finally, pages turn, and prayers are offered for the poor. The gifts of God are great.

Time and more time and all those evenings spent alone staring long hours into shadows on the hearth. "I knew him, I knew him," was all that could be said.

Knowledge is that fearful thing that sets scenes in time from which we see and from which we can never not know. Memories swell and a wounded heart leans heavily on the cuff of love. "I cannot leave the incessant thought of concern for his life," she utters.

Days are spent with tasks that will not fill the hours from sunrise to sunset. Children play, grow, eat, and ask, "Where is he?"

That blessed bell tolls in the late afternoon when a moment's repose sends scattering souls and a Lady on her way to a convent's simple chapel, where a wife's and mother's will is tested against the passing of the days and the absence of his presence, and their purpose will kneel again in silent hope and prayer.

And then she saw him, bearded bleeding and scared, a fleeting glimpse from far away as he rode among the rabble. A hand is raised, and a heart is torn from a tender bosom as faith, hope, and charity are crucified in time. She screamed his name and ran after him, to touch his cloak, to see his eyes, to seek his soul.

She shouts, "I care!" It carries such complete commitment from early morning shadows, to brilliant days, to soft evenings and sunlit moons. Questions without answers, truths without deeds, a single soul prays for a purpose to be found in his licentious degradation. Nothing! He does not see, he does not hear, he does not turn from his trail of woe. The children cry, small creatures to breasts are held as winds carry haunting dreams down empty halls.

Home! The days pass, the Masses shared in silent hope for divine intervention to turn his mind to the Truth. "Where is he? Why can't I touch him and turn him to a path towards home? Is there something that I could have done for him that would have set the sails for a different course? Was time lost that might have sealed a different fate?"

Responsibility must lie somewhere in time. There is a shared sense of being at the same time, on the same path. “My prayers for him are mine! His must be his! Truths are there in the Divine – why? where? when? were they thrown into the wind? What screaming gales have torn them from his mind? I know he knew when we walked and talked of them on the threshold of our love. There is a place in his heart, I saw it. I felt it. It was real and golden. He does know! I know he does! Father, help him see!”

Thunder breaks from the bowels of the heavens and lightning streaks across the darkened raging sky. A knife is held high as hilt is hit by a blessed bolt. A mind is seared by heaven’s heat and a body is sent sprawling to the ground. Waves of heavy water break from laden clouds cleansing years of misdirection from a soul’s searching past. A spark of hope springs forth and tears cascade over the ravages of time and deeds from a body, a mind, and a soul.

“Here now, Father, strike me! I am done,” is all he says.

Hands clasped with knees numbed on stone floors throughout the night, a voice lost in prayer turns to song and an *Alleluia* breaks the silence of a dim dawn as a baptism of desire purges sin’s dark stain.

“I own it all!” was screamed as clouds parted and a star spit its last light upon the scene. “With Your Will Father, my strength will carry me back to myself: Your gift of my me to me.” There came a shudder, “Respect the truth and live thy plan!” rumbled through his soul.

“I can Father and I will!” was all he said.

\* \* \*

An essence filled the room as embers sent forth their soft warmth. A fatigued body near the hearth is gently lifted to the bed, and there knowing feelings tell that they are wed. Hands touch as eyes meet and renewed troth is whispered into dying coals.

Faith, hope, and charity have brought forth their fruit for yet another family that will spend its days and years living in the Father's Garden.

\* \* \*

The Old Lady remembered.

The Old Abbey listened.

The Ancient Parchment held safe the telling words.

Note: These two pieces were written after making a late afternoon house call. Hours were spent counseling a suicidal couple, one sitting on the bed with a 357 magnum in her mouth, the other in a chair with a knife at his heart. They, and the children, are now fine.



## JOURNEY OF MY HANDS TO THEE<sup>1</sup>

Why when in greeting  
were they twisted and entwined?  
I know no law or custom that,  
I for one,  
have broken save that of truth declared  
when horrors were done.

\* \* \*

Bound they will not move  
and as I struggle  
sinew saws through flesh to bone ...  
and then I know I'm not alone.  
As fingers touch a golden ring  
some where I know a soul sings.  
Sentence struck and handed down,  
I clench by chain-bound fists and  
curse the clown that wears the  
crown,  
his dastardly deeds so well  
renowned.  
Days in dungeons dank and deep,  
knuckles ache and fingers weak,  
by hands I hang with broken bones  
cursing guards through tears and  
moans.  
And then I pull against those iron  
rings  
and know that still a soul sings.  
Banished from my love and land,  
I'm condemned to search in sea and sand.

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<sup>1</sup> A transcription from old language, old parchment, and old memories.

Boarding boat the gangplank sways  
as chain-bound hands grip the rope  
silently I pray and hope.  
I turn and glance and castle see  
turret tipped with family crest  
and know I'll miss their smiles and tears.  
A hand-blown kiss to them is blessed  
then with the weight of impending years,  
I become obsessed.  
Through tree tops drifting green from sight  
a movement faint is seen  
– below where sea meets shore –  
my love!  
With outstretched hand  
I reach toward land  
and curse the king  
as fingers feel again my golden ring.  
Through saintly boughs of spruce is seen  
a solitary statue's banded vow,  
as sails catching wind,  
waves are sliced by bow,  
that will not linger.  
Stifling curses with back of hand,  
I raise my arm and wave my hand  
caught in iron bands  
to thee and lands.  
Highlands are lost to touch and sight  
as stars begin the twinklings of the night.  
I grip the rail till fingers burn  
and to thee I swear I will return.  
Folded hands offer a silent prayer to Him  
and in my soul a fire within.  
To southern coast the ship has gone and  
I am left on shore of sea swept sand.

Alone I stand in strange and far-off land  
my hands the first time free  
since last I waved to thee beneath far-off tree.  
I turn to find I'm not alone and from sand so still  
scurry over nearest hill  
to throw my body to the ground  
and joy I find in being unbound.  
The riders have seen me not  
and off they move along green sea.  
For days,  
nothing, and from knees I rise  
and lifting hands up to the skies  
I clench my fists in anguish and then repent  
as cold rain from Heaven is sent.  
Again, I kneel  
then with cupped hands  
a drink from savage sands I steal.  
The sands,  
through protecting hands  
are windswept in my eyes  
and all I hear are cries.  
As more sand is blown  
my pain has grown  
until I can stand no more  
and wonder what my hands are for.  
They tell me of my agony  
in losing land and thee.  
Then they become for me my sight  
as I wander lost through day and night.  
Stumbling, fumbling with hands a'thrall  
I slip and fall against a wall.  
Then on hands and knees  
fingers sense and see and tell  
the softness of the earth by well.

With trembling hands,  
I scoop cool mud  
and lay it gently on my eyes  
as tears they flood.  
I wait and pray, until  
finally, the skies are mine today.  
For weeks I wander on the shore,  
tongue parched; hands sore  
wondering if I'll ever more  
be given the gift of a meal  
for from the few who wander here  
I dare not steal.  
I know the sight of dreaded stump  
that left a hand a severed lump.  
Weary for rest I think it best  
then down to ground where I am found  
from deep sleep wakened by brutal blow  
I shout, "Lord No!"  
For lying there upon the ground  
I feel my hands as they are bound.  
Two years a slave in a Sultan's galley  
hands curved and hardened to the core.  
They heave and ho and know no more than oar.  
With sweat and salt beneath the sail  
I feel the wind and fear the gale.  
The night is black.  
I continue on, no hope of slack  
from impending months of chore.  
Hands bloody and sore  
sought to move my iron-wrought hook  
that holds me from the shore  
and keeps me trapped to dreaded oar.

With chain held firm I pull with all my might  
then, in the dark of night  
suddenly from wood springs free  
my hands and me!

To bow and down on knees I go, set for one  
last move with fingers taut and holding groove.  
The guard he comes and then it's done.

I grab his knife and take his life.

Another comes and throttling enemy  
in my escape it too is done  
then I know I've finally won,  
yet wondering if his loves will know that paths  
crossed and wills were one against the other set  
when hands broke free  
and clutching throat did jerk  
sending a body to the sea?

The wind is up, and boat sent tossed,  
grasping ropes, I pull and feel flesh and hemp  
as heat builds burning in my hands  
I haul and hope to turn the keel  
and in the coming calm the salt will heal  
and off to land I'll steal.

Shore is seen as guards are routed by the gale,  
and see an oar sit vacant at the wale.

From rope I swing and from ghostly galley  
with fluttering sails my hands set free.

At last they seek the sea ...  
and then to thee.

The dive is made as ship and yoke  
are left and hands pull quickly through  
water's raging torrents.

Gathering for another stroke  
they slip from surface then thrown through  
cut and move me to the shore  
no more a slave of that dreaded oar.

Jagged face of shore is scaled in the squall  
as rocks become my enemies.  
I slowly crawl on hands and knees  
seeking shelter of the trees.  
Finally, falling to the ground, there  
hands are clasped and prayers I sound.  
Needles soft and slender  
beckon me to touch and render  
images of linen soft and lovely hair.  
Fists are clenched and needles broken  
as a subtle token  
of a longing for your fragrance fills the air.  
Far from highlands and from thee,  
I seek and search to find a tree.  
Embracing it I long to see  
hands holding bark and branches  
as it shares and sheds its strength with me.  
Somehow, somewhere,  
these hands will find a way from tree to thee.  
The trail is gone in darkness dense,  
I can only crawl and sense  
with outstretched fingers worn  
bleeding and torn  
seeking signals from the stone-cut slopes,  
sinking, sinking in my hopes.  
Groping hands have eyes become  
as darkness moves to steal a numb  
sea cast body from the cliff.  
I struggle through a riff  
and a hollow's found  
as tired hands settle body to the ground.

In hushed silence, I find and enter a cave.  
There, I kneel and give praise to the knave  
as hands enjoin what's won  
and to the Son  
a prayer is uttered when all is one.  
Asking, seeking, pleading the Heavenly One,  
a source of strength till with thee again I've run.  
Knuckles gnarled, scraped and bleeding  
hang at my sides flexing and kneading,  
ready for their journey back to thee.  
I turn and send a blessing to that raging sea  
that brought me here to cliff and tree.  
Sliding down a creviced path, footing's lost  
when branches jut and tear as hold from frost  
is sought and finally slapping flesh to trunk,  
I'm left hanging by a slender sliver  
as hand is caught and left to quiver.  
Knife slipped from belt and splinter  
severed at last  
freeing a hand from wood held fast.  
Pressed and wrapped it begins to seal  
setting the stage for scars to heal.  
Holding pace and form I run, hands throbbing,  
sensing and giving numbness and a robbing  
from an aching man's breath  
all cares and whiles see only death.  
I continue on through wilderness in search  
of path or pine  
that will give me hint of thee and mine.  
Heaving heavy gray stone sunk in slippery mud  
the hillside left its place  
as I lose my stride of a painful pace.  
By sliding to the valley floor  
they bar me from my home and door.

Struggling through the aftermath  
hands grasp and feverishly fling from rain hit  
hard those boulders from my path.  
From the mist and darkness springs a wolf and  
grabbing growling fangs  
felt deep I guide my knife through fur and foam  
and shout, "I will come home!"  
Wet and warm with blood they pull me through  
the slide  
and settle gently to my side.  
Rest and sleep are what I need and so to shelter  
sought from battles fought  
and there to rinse and clean mud and blood  
from weary hands.  
Then, far from you knowing I still must roam,  
I fold them and needing warmth  
plunge them deep within the loam  
as eyes close and from dream's foam  
come visions of winding trails showing the way home.  
Trails traveled through rock and ravine  
hunger eating at body and soul  
stumbling on a rotting carcass  
where there I kneel  
and with trembling hands to feel  
and tear, then sinew from bones I steal.  
Hours spent stripping sinew left to dry  
twisting fingers smooth the string  
and at last I cry,  
"I'll have a way to live  
and to beasts my arrows give!"  
A branch is sought and severed from its place.  
Shaved and turned in blistered fingers  
a smile lifts to face.  
Then, on heated stone bent to curve and feel  
sinew set to ends and bow is real.



Reeds are notched and ends are split  
as tips of bone to shafts are knit  
and straightened to sight and feel.  
Then rolling gently in my hands a weapon ideal  
and finally, I feel  
I will make it to my love and land  
and off I stride with bow in hand.  
Slowly slipping silently through glade and glen  
a stand is seen, and snag is scaled,  
A movement is seen in the green,  
and body frozen ready waits with fingers  
curled to string so tight  
the hunter in his world has no doubt  
about the flight.  
Tender tips of fingers pulling taut the bow string  
stretch to anchor point then fling  
arrow from perch on crag  
through stilled air to heart of stag.  
The deer it staggers off to trail and there to fall  
for men to see.  
Then they're off in search of me.  
From hands to back the bow is flung  
and gripping branch to ground I'm swung.  
Three to tree  
and near me now, no time to flee.  
The choice is made for me and three ...  
Knife to hand and them to sand.  
No one will keep me from my land!  
From bodies cold  
left to woods and mold  
I'm off to stag  
and meat to bag  
with eyes sent swiftly to trail's end  
I know the King more men will send.

Hands and back with provisions weighted  
I stride through sedge.  
to water's edge  
to flee from King and men so hated.  
I store my stuff and think with glee  
of finding thee  
while leaving tracks in muck and swirling sea.  
Bobbing trunk in churning waves  
finally breached  
as weight is rendered heavy  
and rest is reached.  
Hands see and find a hold  
as night grows old and water cold.  
Spent grips slip as light breaks the gray  
and the burning sun becomes my day.  
Beset by fearsome seas  
a fouled feathered duck is sent to me.  
Weary and resting, clinging to my tree  
a lightning move with hand is made  
the neck is severed with my blade.  
From slippery trunk shore of bay is seen  
and towards it my hands pull me  
through sea's green sheen  
with kelp and slime of brine,  
I slide my trunk to the beach  
and ask the saints my hands to teach.  
From leg of bird a needle's made  
and sinew sewn through deer skin laid.  
A mind's eye sees as my busy hands sew,  
a picture of my love does grow.  
Soft gentle hands move busily in a task of love,  
guided by a faith above.  
A sea is all that's left to cross.  
A craft is needed for the deed.

Suddenly, from moss,  
thrust forth a rusted axe is seen to lie  
beneath the moist and misty sky.  
With handle fashioned fresh and fast  
by healed hands made to last  
the tool is sunk to trunk  
in laboring logs to mast.  
with axe and knife the blows are struck  
and then a final chip and chuck.  
The oar is made  
and swiftly from my hidden glade  
a raft is slipped through muck and sedge  
to water's edge.  
Off again I set to sea,  
my hands I rededicate to thee.  
When nearing land and trail see  
that leads to loch and tree  
I stand no more and fling my oar  
jumping full tilt to reach the shore.  
Finally,  
Scotland and the hills  
my hands beset with chills,  
I feel so close to thee and mine.  
Resting now against a pine  
tired hands and journey's last bit for me.  
I sag against our tree at river's edge  
and from that ledge  
still feel far from thee.  
Suddenly, a child's scream is heard,  
or the frightened bleating of a herd.  
Lo! There drifting in the river roaring  
a form is seen.

Slipping quickly through moss so green,  
a soul's driven from sheer face of cliff  
where hands held fast  
as feet sought steps to last,  
a dive is made, and life is saved.  
To door to knock and gently hold  
a listless form of child  
and free of fear to be so bold  
to give a gift of life and love  
to startled parents found and told  
and can't see and are yet to be unbound  
from sharing God's and King's responsibility.  
A silent sign is given, and arms reach out  
and hands touch.  
The child exchanged as such.  
The warmth of a smile speaks gratefully of  
deeper things than proclamations.  
A hurried retreat and a glance back sees  
a waving hand from a mother relieved.  
Through slush of ice, cold and blue,  
through sand and heat and gentle breeze  
stretching fingers taut and tender freeze  
as they shed their need for you.  
Fingers fumbling numb and cold  
scrape leaves and bark to make a fold.  
With flint and knife strike sparks to tinder  
in the snow  
and there they light and there they glow.  
Clutching ground with body bent  
strength is all but spent  
as spark is blown to flame  
I find a heart that's left of blame  
when slowly twigs and knots a fire make  
on frozen shore of lake.

From icy ground to warmth of blaze  
they yearn and slowly through the cold and haze  
a stiffness melts  
from limbs unclothed from under pelts.  
They burn with new-found force sending  
in their mending  
messages of shooting pain  
as strength they gain.  
Slowly waves of warmth uncurl  
from their crookedness finger by finger  
as after brisk rub they limber.  
My mind relaxes in fire's heat  
then from memory's retreat  
revives again those gentle  
tingling touches of evenings long forgotten  
as there I sit to eat.  
When hand in hand we played and planned  
our future family and land.  
In touching you they touched our band  
we knew no fear of King and sand.  
Time slips slowly into dead of night.  
A weary body nestles near for fear of flight.  
Fire gives warmth and strength  
and when at length  
my hand from cloak stretches into night  
to lay another log in fire's light  
from fire's warmth hands set free feel wood  
and with birth of idea comes a should  
as I think of thee beneath tall tree  
with lacy boughs on windswept shore  
waving, waiting there wrapped in lore.  
Dagger drawn from sheath is held  
and poised above a labor of love.

Suddenly, guilt crashes and swells  
and quells all feelings I have for tree and thee.  
Hilt and hand forming one  
blade is turned and struck to ground.  
I cannot use them to create  
when they of late  
have slashed and stilled so many.  
Sitting and staring at empty hands  
I cannot bear the thought of love and lands.  
Clenched in anger clutching cloak is rent  
and finally, they  
a freedom find in purpose and intent.  
A man is meant for one and many things I'm told  
as bell in far off distance tolls.  
Time passes, log held, knot felt,  
visions of my land and lumber  
give rise beneath my slumber  
as notions nudge knowing fingers  
suddenly a form is found  
and sitting there upon the ground  
I take dagger in my hand unbound.  
Fingers curved and carving done,  
dagger waits hanging in my hand  
for soul's eye to see  
where next its slice will be.  
Then it's done  
– a gift of tree from me to thee.  
Gentle form with hand in tunic tucked  
I settle in my slumber  
with growing visions of my lands and lumber.  
A castle will I make for thee  
filled with children by the sea.  
Morning mist in rising unveils  
distant highlands glistening green.

Down to valley and horse encounter  
– and stolen,  
a gift from Him.  
Then with hands so swollen  
and no remorse I mount sending  
my strange found steed  
dashing off through swamp and reed.  
Leaves slap and slide over them  
as reins gripped tightly send horse and rider  
down familiar paths through trees  
and memories that tear  
and wear.  
They know how close they are to golden hair.  
Fingers grasping mane and slipping sweaty  
from horse as hoof and ground crash violently  
they swerve to miss a tree  
as in the distance a roof I see.  
Then they gently nudge and urge  
as trail I see, and home is felt as through them  
a new-found strength does surge.  
Looming lonely, lovely castle seen  
and a pulsing rushes through them as ween's  
weathered gate is reached.  
Familiar wood is felt and wide open flung  
as there above a prayer is sung.  
Swinging freely in what they say  
they guide me through hallway and to courtyard.  
The singing's yours I pray.  
Stairs are reached and hands haul body  
quickly to door.  
Latch to feel and there I kneel  
a prayer to send  
then through to journey's end.

Latch slowly lowered by hands that could  
holding heavy weathered wood  
pressed in and there I finally stand  
before my love in my own land.  
Thee to see  
as fingers thongs and cape set free.  
Throwing wolf skin to the floor  
my hand is swung and slowly door is shut  
as bonds of banishment are cut.  
They are restless now in knowing what they win,  
clenching and unfolding  
they seek the softness of your skin.  
Rising from your vespers,  
robe in dropping clears your feet  
and steps made quickly till we meet.  
Then they tell me of your strains  
and all the aches and pains of yore  
are forgotten on far distant shore.  
In their rush they gently slide from shoulder  
to your back and in a shiver  
turning quickly, you see from whence the sliver.  
You hide them in your hands.  
Chafed and scarred brands,  
they have scraped you in touching  
and you hold them unbelieving.  
They are not the hands you knew.  
Silently exploring eyes and fingers search palms  
and backs as messages are uttered from the psalms.  
Feeling and seeing savage signs of strength  
and struggle  
you know the journey and its length.  
Cupped and slowly sliding slender fingers over  
cuts and scars, tears fall  
as moist lips meet and follow traces of their  
trouble.



From bars of cell to gates of hell  
they have so many things to tell.  
Eyes raised  
sending questions through their gaze  
then silenced through soft squeeze of hands  
held tightly.  
There will be moments when nightly  
paired they will in holding share  
the story of their separation  
and make time for gentle reparation.  
You fill their calloused hollows  
with kisses and in your eyes  
I see the pain of years of loneliness and strife.  
In touching you they know my wife.  
Tears and touch have softened them  
knowing there will be time to heal  
from journey's harsh blows.  
You part and guide them as one who knows  
to lips still moist and warm  
and to your breast so soft a form.  
With one to breast, the other to lips held fast  
tears tell tales  
of fearsome nights and awful gales  
when worry wore heavy on the souls  
of two who sat and stared into separate  
beds of coals.  
Breast held gently, cradling serenity,  
warmth melts softness fondling femininity,  
holding nipple hardens into life  
molding with calloused fingers  
the chalice of my wife.  
Home is known and knowledge of the journey  
slips from memory's door.  
Together touching we move across floor  
from fixed encounter to our bed.

There again they tell me we are wed.  
Fire's light is sent from two golden bands,  
against which no evil stands,  
to depths of hearts set aflame  
knowing we are still the same.  
With tender tears and telling tales gone  
twilight slips through night to dawn.  
Sleeping lovers through hands held fast  
are to each other betrothed to last.  
Tomorrow they will lift to horse a gentle form,  
a wife from strife,  
and from history's hindrance  
hide away to future and to life.  
To be created in a far-off land  
in mountains close to sea and sand.  
In years to come,  
before bodies and hands grow numb,  
children will know their strength  
as gentle softness for them begotten.  
They will at times question  
silver scars and rough edges  
full of treats and eyes will meet  
as silent smiles smother struggles long forgotten.

## ON THE DEATH OF A SON

The announcer's voice slid from topic to topic in the quick freshness of the morning's news cast. I glanced at the mountains as if to reassure myself in this ever-changing world that they, at least, were still there. My attention returned quickly to the slight incline of the road and the nearing stop sign at the school crossing. Then, I heard a voice say, "Young boy drowned on school trip." My stomach congealed in a mass and was ignited by its tightness burning my insides. My vision blurred and through gritted teeth I said, "No! No! No!" As if a verbalized command could, or would, interrupt the process of life and eliminate events.

"God, I hurt!" A picture of the boy came into my mind and as his coach I saw a tall, handsome, lanky, athletic youth, running, leading his teammates in their practice drills. Standing there watching was a proud involved father. The gleam in his eye gave proof of his satisfaction. The time spent, hours and hours every week, were no burden. Those moments of enjoyment were like a nourishing meal that fed a father's heart.

"God it hurt!" My breath came in short gasps and I felt the pain move through my entire body as the realization pulled forth an age-old euphemism, "A son is lost."

From the moment of conception the thought is that I may have a son, that we may have a son, that I might shape and mold and help create a gift of another self to the world – and to you, to love and hold and in the end to lose. How can all those moments shared in silent hope and then brought forth in flesh and blood be gone?

"God! How the pain hurts!" It gained in intensity as the realization of the severance grew in my mind. "A son is gone!"

It happened as the father was taking a break between basketball and baseball ... the taste of victory still savored, a

moment in repose full of plans for summer fun. The whole sequence of events imagined and realized that led from that first moment of truth, “It’s a boy!” and then through the cuts and bruises and his many other accomplishments. The first bird house, a quail on the wing, the first homerun, the first pass caught, the first touchdown scored, the first deer, the first college game, the finding of the perfect girl, a career, the family, and the moments of wisdom felt and shared when the process moved from self to one, and in that movement – hand to shoulder, eyes meet and knowing smiles are exchanged.

The spring of manhood flows from son to son and fathers feel that special sense of a gift from God to man, “God! How I hurt!”

Where was the dream interrupted? How long was I asleep? Did he finish all his homework? Was he done with all his tasks? When, when did he move from here to there? The events they were so real, were they his or were they mine? Has time meshed past and present into one when feeling sees no end to threads of deeds done and yet undone as life is lived for self and others? How could half the purpose disappear?

“God!” ... a pain that goes from man to man and cements a sense of strength and oneness moves a man to action and to thought. An accident ... anger swells and the fire felt within increases as a sense of purpose grows; to pay attention to the process is all I ever asked.

Knowing there would be moments of abandon when the will to conquer circumstance would push and motivate your moves ... Remember, with your sense of urgency, there must always be that habit of reflection ... that moment when a self observes and reasons through to “Yes! I can!” and does.

Life is a journey from birth to death, but why so soon? The car, it moves. My eyes are clearing, but the pain it does not disappear. I think, “That poor father, how he must feel.” I will call him and share his grief.

This afternoon I will also reach out and touch my sons and tell them of the loss of a friend. Arm to shoulder we will stand and gently I’ll remind them of the process and how they must practice the habit of reflection and the will to win. Then, I will silently pray that this pain will never come to visit me again.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We lost our youngest son many years later and that same searing pain came again to visit. See the poem “*The Parting*” in this collection.

## FINDINGS: THE OLD STUMP

I turned to set the measuring stick against another tree and there it was ... an enormous old stump. Its soft rusty dark brown form, interspersed with the lush greens of moss and lichen, had remained hidden until I almost rammed the butt of the measuring stick into its decaying roots. I paused and let my eyes and mind drift over the old remains. I found myself leaning the stick against a small mountain maple and thinking, "What a magnificent old stump and to think I had missed seeing it for a whole month as I worked around the site."

I wondered why I had been so unobserving, a stump of this size ... Well, there was the subtle blending of the tree trunks, the forest floor, the cast of colors and shadows, and ... Or was it because I was only looking at the trees to be cut and thinking of a number that could be translated into dollars and cents? I felt a pang of guilt. I had been counting trees. I tried to soothe my feelings with brief recollections of moments when I had indeed reflected on the size and beauty of the trees I was cutting. It served as little comfort and, as man is wont to do, my mind slipped from my injured sensibility back to the beauty of the old stump.

The moss-covered top was weathered with chunks missing here and there, but there was no mistaking the flat plane that indicated it had been cut by man. The top was about three and a half to four feet above the ground. Perhaps a winter cutting or the passage of time? My imagination moved back over the years and began formulating a picture.

In response to the beckonings of the mind's wonderings my body began to move. I shut off and set down the chain saw that had been idling in my hand and moved to an appropriate position near the stump. Leaning towards the top with my arms outstretched and my hands clenched, I moved slowly back and forth following the movements of a man, one of a team of two, who years before had stood on the same spot.

My mind's eye could see the ever-deepening path of the cross-cut as it moved through the tree, raking its way towards the notch. I could even see the sawdust spilling in a cascade of white on the forest floor. It must have been beautiful. The ground now was salted heavily with aspen and maple leaves that in their irregularity were evidence of a period of transition. I slipped instantly back over the years and found my body still moving to the rhythm of the saw.

I could almost feel the teeth biting into the soft wood and smell the sweat and fragrance of the pine as a body labored at its task. Who was the logger? When was he here? So many questions that could never have precise, neat, technological or computer answers, and yet would always persist in the tracks of time.

Through the vision of sifting sawdust, my mind returned to the rotting stump. There laced on its sides, as if by the hand of a master craftsman, were honeycombs of old ant tunnels and beetle holes with scattered large caverns where a woodpecker had mined a meal. The ants were all gone, and the worms had receded to the damp recesses of the roots. Only scattered wispy cobwebs hinted at present activity. The forms of the many contours were like pages of a diary that the stump was revealing to anyone who passed by. On the northeast side there was a charred section. The hardened black surface told a story all its own.

My mind and my eyes finished their journey around the old stump, and I found myself enjoying a feeling of identification with the many faces of activity that life shows favor to bestow on all its manifestations. I slowly reached over and took a small pinch of the soft humus that had once formed the heart of the tree. It felt cool, rich, and now it was becoming the new soil for a hardwood forest. The process keeps on moving, giving, changing, and creating.

I backed away, gathering the saw and the measuring stick in my hands, and as I turned my attention to the next tree I was to cut, I couldn't help noticing how refreshed I felt. The old stump had spoken, and I had stopped to listen.



THE QUEST FOR SELF:  
MUSINGS OF A YOUNG LOGGER

Alone I stood in the deep dense lushness of the sphagnum, sinking slowly to the level of the water and as its cool penetrating wetness seeped through my boots and enveloped my feet, sending chilling messages to the rest of my body, I buried my face in the soft branches of a cedar and cried. “I” was not “me.”

The force of my face nestled in the cedar freed a fragrance so familiar, so self, so one. Why was it so simple for this tree to be and not for me? Quickly the warmth of my tears turned cold on my face and in that simple change of state I felt one with the process – things are what they are and yet are affected by so many other things. Standing in a swamp and feeling that momentary identification with the process provided little that could be captured and called “me.”

Suddenly, an “I need to know!” came pounding forth. The strength with which the “I” presented itself pulled me farther from myself. I lifted my face and saw the many different forms spreading through the swamp. They were so much themselves, in their newness, in their nowness, in their greenness, in their dying. Why can’t “I” be, just, all, only me? So much of my energy is spent trying to see and “I” see so little. But “I” think there is so much of me to see. Again, an invasion of the “I.” Could it be that in the process of the seeing everything that’s me gets lost? No, no, it isn’t that. There is a feeling that gives me confidence, a caressing, a soft gentle something that is saying ... “Me!” Suddenly, and silently as with all memories, I’m hit with the realization that when one is small, a child, “me want” is used in such a meaningful way ... before an “I.”

The child is father of the man and I could wish my days to be bound each to each by natural piety.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth, *My Heart Leaps Up*.

To be in that state of simple selfishness of a child, an emanation that says, “Me!” to the world ... being me, just me, all me, a stumbling, fumbling, gentleness that no one understands as unnatural or grotesque. But in a man, when search for self becomes an all, it can possess and convey a sense of being lost. Or, is it the feeling that someone was indeed lost on that journey into maturity and that someone is exactly the needed element that enables a self to be found?

My hands find the smooth shaggy soft bark of the cedar and in that simple act of touch I’m found and lost again. Is this the “me” through which “I” mean to measure everything, just a series of fleeting vortices that give illumination and a sense of oneness only when they cross in this sea of effervescent being? And then, in another sudden silence, “I” know my “me” needs another me ... a someone in whom, through whom, and by whom the fabric of myself can become a one that coincides with the elemental and astral flights of me. But there persists in my foolishness a need for security to discover without fear of losing contact that simple, gentle self as an emergence from my “me” as it conflicts with my “I.” Analogies, analogies, a soft breath, a breeze, a ray of sunlight, a sunset, a chill, a moon rise, a snowflake, as wonderful as they are, they are not enough, I need a you.

## REFLECTIONS IN THE EARLY MORNING

What a sound! As if serving as an alarm clock, suddenly my senses are awakened and I feel the crispness of the still, cool spring lingering everywhere, in the shadows, in the dampness of the ground, and in that interval of stillness there seems to be myriad effervescent vortices of life that are slowly gathering for the final thrust that brings a new generation of life.

There comes an intermittent lively wind carrying interruptions of songs from the many species of birds that are quickening their pace in preparation for the coming events. Just to my right a pair of chickadees is alternating from a maple branch to a rotting aspen snag, pecking feverishly in the top, hollowing a home for their anticipated family.

As I watch their persistent pecking, first one and then the other, I find myself wishing man could better heed the rhythmical nature and follow the dictates of a law of necessity. Perhaps the wild gesticulations of the “now world” could fold themselves into a pattern of caring that dedicates itself to the perpetuation of life. Man has indeed learned to make the atom and electrons speak; he must also learn to understand their languages.

The wind has suddenly picked up and as the various instruments of the organic orchestra begin their movement, my eyes are drawn to the soft lacy new aspen leaves dangling from their perches. They are some of the first leaves of spring that begin the weaving of a many-textured canopy that will eventually shield the forest floor from the soft, shimmering rays of the summer sun.

As my mind creates a picture of the sanctuary of a summer forest it is suddenly shattered by an interruption ... There is that sound again! I wonder how many years that same duet has echoed through the forest. All that is needed is a gentle breeze and the two again begin their piece. What quirk

of nature lodged tree to tree to create in their embrace a symphony for all?

I remember as a young boy hearing the various sounds of the forest and wondering what all those noises were. What animal was it that squeaked, moaned, groaned, and cracked? On one particular occasion my imagination was further fired by my father's anxious questioning, "Did you hear that? Shush! Listen!" I strained my ears, recalling the stories of how well the mountain men and trappers could hear, and finally I heard a most peculiar sound.

"What is it?" I asked in hushed excitement. And he responded excitedly, "A Tree Squeak!"

Quickly my imagination was off and running. I had heard the soft melody of the tree toad, but this Tree Squeak was so different. I wondered what kind of animal it was. Having caught the excitement in my father's voice I asked, "What makes that noise?" In a serious mischievous way, he said, "Shush! Follow me!" Slowly we stepped through the leaves and twigs that covered the forest floor, pausing periodically to listen and catch the sound, giving us a new bearing.

Finally, after a meticulous search "somewhere up there," he knelt down and with one hand on my shoulder pointed to a spot where a tree had fallen and lodged itself against another tree. There it remained, locked in an embrace of time.

I searched up one tree and down the other and could see no sign of life. Suddenly, right before my searching eyes, the strange sound came forth again. I recall thinking it must be a very small animal and yet it makes such a loud strange sound. Exasperated with my fruitless search and moved by the excited anxiousness of my father, I whispered, "Where is it?"

Sensing my plight and cognizant that he had intentionally created at least a part of my confusion, he said, "Right there!" pointing to the intersection of the two trees. I looked again hard and long but to no avail and finally, defeated in my

attempt to see as the woodsman sees, I slowly whispered, “But I don’t see anything.”

A soft, gentle smile came to his face, lighting with a twinkle his pale blue eyes, and realizing I was still looking for an animal of sorts he explained, “See that spot where those two trees come together?” “Yes,” I answered, searching frantically once more in hopes of catching a glimpse of whatever was responsible for the sound and our search. He continued, “Right there where those two trees meet is a spot where they rub against each other and that rubbing is what makes the sound.”

Suddenly it came to me . . . a Tree Squeak, the squeaking, rasping, scraping noise, a Tree Squeak was two trees rubbing together to make a sound. “Oh, that’s what it is,” I said in a disappointed childish way, “Just a tree.”

The smile did not fade from my father’s face and we remained silent for a moment while the breeze blew the two lovers back and forth as they sighed to each other. I recall leaving that spot with a feeling of disappointment. The excited expectation of seeing a new and interesting animal was destroyed by the realization . . . “It’s just a tree.”

As I sit here now, many years later, I can’t help but think of the long fermenting process that takes place in a person’s mind from the time the spores are sown by a parent or incident to the final product of the wine. There were many times since that first encounter with a Tree Squeak that, upon hearing a strange noise in the forest, I would detour from whatever my pursuit and seek out the strange union that squeaked in the wind. As I grew older and felt again my embarrassment when I became aware of my initial ignorance in searching for some kind of animal, I would stand and listen and look around, feelings a twang of childhood fear to see if anyone was watching this mighty hunter listening to a Tree Squeak.

Now, sitting here looking at the aspens that will soon fall to the saw and listening to a Tree Squeak, I have decided to leave this Tree Squeak so that my sons can have an opportunity to encounter this strange process of life. And through the ups and downs of understandings and misunderstandings they'll learn as I have learned, to love "just a tree."

THE ASCENT  
A Play in Three Acts

Act 1 – Scene 1  
(The cell at Avila-Toledo)

Because I have acted upon my beliefs as a dedicated Carmelite and have confronted the thinking of the day, they will incarcerate me. *“Not my will, but Thine be done.”*

They have taken me to the Old Abbey at Toledo; it carries the footprints of so much history. The lives of many are enshrined in its towers, passage ways, and dungeons. And now it is that I too become a guest. There will be moments when I will revel in my solitude and times when I will scream for companionship. So much will be learned, and much will be forgotten.

What? We are here? My cell! The door seems so narrow, so heavy, so thick, a curtain of oaken planks and heavy iron hinges that will seal me from my bothers ... and ... Oh yes! It has a small grilled window. I will be able to see my fellow prisoners, my jailer. But wait ... I see nothing but stone and more stone. The small corridor seems to wind its way through the old structure, separating the parts from the whole and guests from their own kind.

And so it is, with a gentle nudge my brother moves me through the door and with a key he locks it to the many moments of my future. I slowly approach the interior and am greeted by a dank musty odor and a penetrating darkness.

My hands move to the sides of my cell and seek the firmness of the stones as I step further in. Slowly, my eyes begin to encounter the contours of my space. The sounds of the door having been closed and the key having turned become but pieces of my past. I have now entered a new world. My first inclination is to sink to my knees and thank You, the Divine, for sparing my life and to mumble a blessing for my

keepers; that they may be enlightened and become believers in the manifold endeavors of You, the Creator.

This done, I rise and now, my eyes having acquired sufficient ability to make out my quarters, I move to inspect them: a rectangle, six feet by nine feet and as I turn in the far end I feel a draft from above and take note of the small grilled aperture to the outside located high in the ceiling. Adequate and blessed with a view! Of what, I know not, and yet the elation of the small black iron grille for now is all that is important. I will be able to see something and whatever it is will serve to give praise to You my God and to Your Creations.

I turn and extending my arms can almost touch the walls of my cell. Hesitatingly, I measure my space in small steps: two and a half from side to side, five from end to end. Seven and a half steps ... I muse ... seven and one-half ... the seven to help me meditate on the Holy Sacraments, the one half to ... my mind wanders. I had amused my fellow brothers with my wit during moments of trials and tribulations and now I find I cannot help but play with the facts of my surroundings. I return to the moment at hand and continue my inspection. I turn and face the door and am surprised that there is no light coming through the small grilled door window. I move quickly to the door and peering out find nothing that hints at any sign of life.

Slowly, my mind, in reconstructing the moments before I entered my new home, recalls the torch carried by the jailer. Now, he having withdrawn, there is nothing, nothing except the dark gray blackness of the narrow little corridor running from well I knew what to only what You, my Father knows. Backing away from the door, still smitten with the absence of any light, I slowly turn to inspect my other window and Yes! Yes! I rush to the far wall and look up ... shining in the dark blue sky is a star.

As my eyes behold the soft cruciform light gently shining from the heavens, tears of joy well in my eyes and slide



slowly down my cheeks. Thank you Lord! I will be able to see the passing of the days and nights. I will be able to feel the movements of the seasons ... for this favor, I thank You.

Momentarily I find myself transfixed as I stare into the starlit sky, but as with all moments of fixation, they pass, and I turn my attention back to my new home. In walking from side to side and end to end I had missed a small narrow pallet in one corner. Moving now towards each corner my knee irreverently tells me of its presence. Feeling with my hands and concentrating with my eyes, I can barely make out the form. I slowly slide my body down to a sitting position and extending my arms along the planks, discover that indeed, I have a pallet! Upon making this realization, I utter my thanks to You, my Savior, and continue quickly in the investigation of my pallet.

I lay down and find it is quite adequate, of sufficient length and width. Quickly, I rise up and realize in my moment of discovery that a bed could be a curse or a gift depending upon how it is used. I am determined to be creative with my time, to offer to You, the Most Divine, everything I have and to continue in my praise of You and Your Creations.

I stand and again find myself crossing from door to window as if to demonstrate to all who witness that I am master of my world. Having completed my turn, I admonish myself for the arrogance of my actions and beg forgiveness from You, my Father. Who am I to think that I own a part of Your Creation? I chastise myself for my moments of pride and turn my efforts back to the inspection of my cell. I walk from corner to corner and reflect upon the need for daily exercise ... it is small but adequate. In the far end next to the wall runs a drain, it is to be used for my waste. I hope it is flushed with water from time to time. For now, it did not seem to have an adverse odor. I will inspect it further in the morning.

Then, turning my attention to the walls and stretching out my hands I pace slowly back and forth, tracing the configu-

rations of the stones in the darkness of the night. The rough texture seems so consistent with the structure of the dungeon – harsh, jagged, abrupt – and yet as I reflect on the stone I suddenly picture a stone cutter shaping each piece to fit precisely where it was intended ... the calculations that he made ... the sense of satisfaction when things slid into place. Could he have known what he was constructing would become a prison cell? No matter ... in the process of his labors he was perfecting his art and feeding himself and his family.

I slowly feel an attraction to this artisan of so many years ago and continue to feel the joints between the stones and here and there encounter fine forms for they are no longer cold and impersonal blocks of stone. They now represent art forms with a purpose. Into my mind flashes, *“Thou art Peter and upon this Rock I will build My Church.”*

In my confinement within these walls, I plan to lay the ground work for a spiritual canticle for my brothers. I have satisfied myself that I am familiar, in a most cursory way, with my room and I begin to feel the fatigue of my flight and subsequent capture. I turn my attention to my evening prayers and kneeling beside my pallet, give thanks for my good fortune. I am alive and well. In the many days to come I will learn much of myself and You. I seek my pallet and sink into a deep and restful sleep.

## Act I – Scene II

The dawn comes quickly, and I am awakened by the gentle voice of a mourning dove and the first rays of the rising of the sun. Kneeling, I make my morning offering. It is such a habit with me that I find I've left out the most important ... to give thanks, not only for my life and therefore my spiritual inheritance, but also for my new set of circumstances. Duly, I give thanks for my present state of affairs and rise to begin a detailed study of my quarters.

To be sure there are things my eyes and fingers had not told me the night before about my bed ... there are several knots and warped portions of the wood's heavy grain that left their marks on my weary body and now that I am moving, I am reminded of their presence and yet the pain reminds me of Your passion and suffering on the cross and also of the blessings of a pallet. I offer another word of thanks. There would be many nights to experiment with different sleeping positions as well as other areas of the pallet; for now my attention is caught by the view from my window. It is about nine feet up and no larger than the width of my hand once across and twice down, barred and inaccessible. All that is visible is a small patch of blue sky – no buildings, no people, no clouds, no trees ... Nothing! Suddenly I find myself feeling very isolated from everything, all the material things that serve to help men define a purpose and their whereabouts.

Catching myself in a moment of remorse, I remind myself of the beauty of the clear blue sky and counter that there will be moments of weather and birds in flight that I will witness. They will provide assistance for my spiritualization. I turn my attention from the window to the walls of my cell. The forms I had felt last night now appear before me ... small and large stones positioned to enclose a space. I let my eyes and hands roam over the stones. Their different hues of blacks, whites, and grays do not detract from my realization of the artisan's efforts of the night before; indeed, each block is in itself a work of art and the chisel marks enhance the varied forms.

I spend the entire day lost in a sea of stone, allowing my imagination to reach back and race forward, catching glimpses of moments long forgotten and never experienced; the subtle undulations of the stones provide forays into the many crevices of my being. I recall those golden days of childhood when I thought of myself as "Your Little Helper" and on to those

frustrating moments of my adolescence when temptation was overwhelming, and I needed Your Strength.

My mind wanders over the recent years and birth of the new order ... the feeling of coincidence with Your Will in an attempt to create a new movement cleansed and redirected to Your Holy Self. And then, there are those moments of complete abandon when I became one with Your Process of Being and felt as though I was walking with You in Your Vineyard; raptures pure and simple that contained reflective fruit for an eternity of joy.

The day passes quickly and as the sun sets, darkness again creeps into my cell. The stillness of the twilight permeates my stone room with a message of silence and contemplation. I recite my vespers and begin to formulate my evening's activities when there is the sound of someone approaching. A glow appears and as the footsteps draw near it becomes a light ... I wonder if I would ever be granted the use of a candle and, if You saw favor, some writing materials. I move swiftly to the door to meet my visitor, my new brother. As I near the small grilled opening, I see him bend and slide a bowl beneath the door. I quickly look to see what the offering is and while gazing at the broth with some bread, I sense a pause in my benefactor's movements. I glance back to my small grilled window and see him turn and slowly move away. I hurriedly say, "Thank you! I ... I would like to thank you and to know your name." The light and the figure recede and not a word is spoken. Would I ever know who he was? Somehow, I knew I would. In Your Beneficence, I have complete confidence. I bend to collect my meal and move to my pallet. I sit and give the blessing, including a thank you to my unknown friend for I am sure that someday he will be.

The food is good, the quantity small. I finish by wiping the bowl clean with the dry piece of bread. Again, I give You thanks and as if in anticipation of the morrow, begin a ritual that is to repeat itself many times. I move to the door and

sliding my empty bowl into the outside world, I pray I will have the opportunity to break bread with my brothers once again, to enjoy the comradeship of my fellows, to raise my voice with theirs in prayer and song.

Not knowing what to expect, I position myself near the door and wait, hoping to catch my jailer upon his return. Surely, he would come for the bowl. He does not. In what becomes a curious exchange, I discover that he would come and exchange the empty bowl with another containing my daily portion every evening just after twilight. The muffled steps were preceded by the glowing light and then the exchange of bowls. But for now, I wait silently by the door and imagine who he is. He appeared to be quite old and yet there was a steadiness to his gait. It was almost as though he was guided by another hand. The evening wears on and I wait ... and wait ... and wait.

Finally, turning my attention from the dark and lifeless corridor, I catch a glimpse of moonlight shining through my sky window. The thin sliver of light seems to bounce off the floor and reverberate throughout the entire cell, illuminating everything. I become absorbed in the process, convinced that my brother the jailer is not going to return. I try to calculate the day of the month. I had been so busy with my work moving from place to place so often that I had lost track of time. The moon is in its first quarter, I observe, and barring an abundance of clouds I would be able to decipher the days and keep some record of time.

A feeling of satisfaction comes over me and I realize I am intending to measure something that defies measurement, the life passing of a man. To be sure there is a birth – I pray for my mother and my father – and there would be a death – I praise You Father – but in between there is that perennial struggle of spirit and flesh that provides the opportunity for human accomplishment. In that life span of time, measurement seems to be meaningless. Had You, my Christ, not Yourself

redeemed the criminal at Your Right Hand just before he died? A lifetime of sin was forgiven in an act of faith and love.

What wasn't given in the biblical narrative, I often reflected, was the incredible leap of faith and repudiation of all that had gone before: A life of sin that became true and did not matter. The joy of love and faith, the pain of disassociation, the pain of realization; these were moments not to be measured. Slowly, I watched the last speck of moonlight drift out of my cell. The darkness enveloped me and my circumstance. A realization of finality crept into me and I now know this is to be my world for an indefinite period of my life, perhaps the remainder of my days. I weep, and finally in my weariness slip into a restless sleep.

### Act I – Scene III

The dawn comes all too soon and pushes its presence into my cell. I stir and with an effort rise. The early rays sift gently down across the stones, eventually stopping where wall meets floor. The beauty of each stone presents itself and I study the arc's light in the magnificence of every ray.

I rise and kneeling again give thanks for my many blessings. Then, crossing to the wall, I shrug off the remaining stiffness of my restless night fraught with waves of depressive nightmares when my faith had deserted me, my attention now having been caught by a form illuminated in the stone. I shout, "Yes!" There! Not quite halfway up the wall, there it is! I gaze at a large stone whose exposed face did not feel the stone cutter's chisel. Bending to my knees I take up a position at the side so as not to interrupt the flow of light and there before me, I behold a beautiful fossil. The soft curvature of the form is presented in stark relief in a surrounding of rough company. As my eyes follow the unfamiliar form, my hand rises to feel the essence of a being long since passed on and yet so very evident it would persist in time forever, flesh and blood turned

to stone. I suddenly felt small, lost, impoverished in my cell of stone. It almost seemed as if the walls were moving towards me, reaching out to embrace a new candidate for the crystallizing process. A cold chill went through me as I tried to grasp a life-force that would carry me through the moment of seeming oppression and as my eyes refocus on the wall the fossil's form appears to gather itself for a movement. I stay transfixed as my mind meshes with the movement of a minuscule sea creature of the past. And then I'm gone ... Suddenly I feel the warm shallow water flow across my body heated by the penetrating rays of a primordial sun. Slipping in and out between the algae, the filaments, and columnals, I sense a feeling of purpose, a destination. Hungrily moving on in an exuberant movement seeking sustenance, I consume a feast. Resting now I allow the digestive process to provide sufficient energy for my next repast. I float. The quickness with which I have felt the warmth of the sun and the impulse to feed is followed by a fixed static sequencing of an eternal flow of being ... *To what end?* This thought comes crashing through my moment of repose and suddenly I stand, imbued with a determination to survive. With a brief glance back at my tiny fossil friend I forge into the next moment of my existence armed with a raging desire to fulfill a purpose, an example, a ... The strength with which the subtlety of a penetrating realization hits me is overwhelming and jars my very soul ... A poor piece of forgotten rock had illuminated and renewed my purpose for being and had given me a reason to continue in my struggle. How? Who? When? ... And then I know that the stone cutter had known what he was constructing and who his creation was destined to enclose.

Striking out of the past and pushing itself through the present, there is a flash of understanding that was a coincidence of purpose and I kneel and give praise to You my God, the Father, the Creator of small insignificant sea creatures, brethren in the depths of our soul journey, and of artisans, who

in perceiving the great similitude of human circumstance, seeded a seemingly sterile environ with pregnant possibilities for those unfortunate guests whose days would be spent seeking sources of strength to continue in their struggles. I bow my head in prayer and utter a profoundly felt, “Thank you Father God, in Your abundance of Love Your Trinity of Being presents as the Whole that Is.”

Then, in what was to become a weekly ritual on Fridays, I would be removed from my cell and placed in a circle of my brothers in the common dining room where my crimes were read by the superior of the Abbey. After which, stripping the clothes from my back, all of the brothers would in turn quickly strike me with a rod until blood ran down to my waist.<sup>1</sup> While this was going on, I would fix my attention upon the Living Christ and His Suffering for humanity and thank him for his gift of love.

Afterward I was returned to my cell and in following what would become a forever prayer, I meditated on my surrounding circumstances, concluding that the stone cutter had known there would be guests for the cells he was creating and from a jumbled pile of rocks he selected a precious portrait of the past and set it in a privileged place. Suddenly, a warmth of being envelops me and tears stream down my face. “*In Him, through Him, by Him.*” This was indeed manifest in the many moments of all being, including mine. Resolved: To seek Your strength at all times and in all circumstances and to glean from the myriad forces of the process those moments, all exemplars of Your Will. “*Not my will, but Thine be done!*”

My prayer became, “With confidence I will proceed through my period of incarceration. Thank you for your blessings of suffering.” These moments would become those perfecting moments of a process that could serve as a model

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<sup>1</sup> These wounds would never heal and were for St. John of the Cross carried to his death.



to others who in their wanderings would have need of a road map of being, leading to a process of sanctification.

Act II – Scene I (5 months later – a sunrise)

I continue to praise and pray and still You do not come ... I continue to compose in my mind and yet ask, “For whom? ... And for what? ... What must I do? ...

This cell has been my home for five months. I have succeeded in measuring time ... but what joy is there in knowing how long I’ve been here when I don’t feel any closer to You now? I have organized my days and nights. I have programmed each moment of my time. I have done it all and still I don’t feel any closer to You. I have entered into a season of great aridity. What must I do?

The cell’s circumstance closes about me, and I feel as if I am about to be consumed by some force, that although not part of me still comes through me. I seem to be transfixed in a pattern of power that could, and would if I allowed it, create in me a cause through which a course might be wrought that maligned the very process of creation.

Terrified, I cross my cell and kneel next to my pallet, crushed by the weight of this moment of malevolent convergence. I sink into despair. Hours pass and slowly the sun’s warm rays drift through my window of time, and sifting gently their presence through my cell they illuminate the paths worn here and there throughout these many months. The trails of my movements scraped with shuffled steps from place to place.

One could divine the stations of my pilgrimage from door to corner ... still, I hope and nightly wait to share words with my jailer ... from corner to pallet, where feet and knees have left their marks. Food blessed and then consumed. From bed to door to place an empty bowl beneath that curtain of crude wood and there to stand peering into the darkness of an

inner corridor that seems to become a part of me, a black space devoid of all life and movement.

Then, my wandering hands catch a movement in the grain of the oak planks and sensing some direction, a gift of process to the world, I kneel and trace the passing of the seasons sewn in alternating soft and hard sequences that give form to spring, summer, fall, and winter.

Many times, during the day, I sit and contemplate the shapes that spring from the trails of sap and wood in their transitions. Tall cathedrals, muted landscapes, a countenance contoured around a knot. And yes, there is a favorite form that resembles a young bearded youth, long hair, and gently sloping shoulders. To me it is the Christ Youth who would in time become a sacrifice for all. I ponder on His moments of childhood and wonder if He knew all that lay before Him and what lies in store for me. I think not. Like a mountain climber who never knows until he's at the summit, He spent His days in preparation and then in a supreme effort, He surmounted the obstacles of His Mission one by one. I hear your words: "*Not my will, but Thine be done.*" I must do the same.

Failing in my efforts to make contact with my jailer, I stand and move from door to window and spend a good portion of my night contemplating the heavens. Why, when the stars are so far away, do they seem so close to us? Their shimmering soft specks of light shine as if from a sea of blackness. Are they really souls who have achieved a measure of success? As my mind and eyes roam the orbs, I feel kindred to those twinkling essences and vow again to strive for a measure of perfection in Your Perfecting Process.

After hours of wondering, the draft drives me to my sheltered corner and my pallet and after prayer, I retire. But sleep is often just a dream as I compose my prayerful poems of The Process ... Having no instruments with which to write, I am bound to the ability of my mind to create and capture sense and sound, and, upon many repetitions, I hope they will

be there when needed for inspiration or amusement. I have constructed several pieces: *The Living Flame of Love*, *The Spiritual Canticle*, and *The Dark Night of the Soul*. At present I am working on the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, a piece that is giving me some trouble ... I know there is a door and a ladder and that somehow my soul can escape from this prison house of the body, but I have difficulty capturing the movement, when indeed to leave, all has to be at rest. How can one express a movement so distinct and yet so subtle, so momentous and so simple? And then in my hope, I am left with lingering feelings of having been caught up and given a moment of repose with You. I seek sentience and savor a sense of soul ... eventually it will come. But my body, slowly slipping into rest, does not allow for a solution and I sleep.

## Act II – Scene II

My days are spent rising with the sun and after my morning offering time is spent limbering my body and readying myself for my daily walk. Once ready, I am off, from Pastrana to Alcalá, swinging my arms I start off two steps and then a right angle, five steps and then another right angle, two steps and a right turn and five steps back to my point of beginning. Confined to my circumstance, I am bound to this configuration.

There are times, however, when in some strenuous part of my journey I sometimes, upon reaching a corner, turn swiftly and cut diagonally across my cell to the opposite corner. This I do when I reach the steep portion of the trail where in spring and summer so many flowers are in bloom, hanging precariously or perched on a clump of outcropping rock. The journey is always a pleasure. The path winds its way through such beautiful countryside, and, with the many moments of reflection offered by Your Natural Beauty, I pray and climb and contemplate the omnipotence of Your Creation.

Father Your Incredible Power of Creation manifesting itself in each and every corner of the pathway presents a window into the depths of Your Soul. There are even times, when perplexed, that I wander in my wonderings into a dialog with You and question how it is that a creature so imperfect, such as I, could hope to penetrate and participate in Your Divinity?

The answers to my questions always seem so simple, ringing clear out of a biblical past pushing patiently into the present: "*I Am Who Is*" and "*Knock and it shall be opened unto you.*" And then there are those times of uneasiness and distress when in moments of despair a simple scene of bird or branch serves to echo "*Neither do they toil.*" and as wings fold and allow for a descent, I watch as bird meets branch and fragile flight is fixed in perch paused, presenting perfection in itself and I think of my poems.

Often, as the sun is setting, the dynamics of the action seem frozen in the dusking twilight, a gray-black silhouette signifying the oneness of The All.

Upon occasion my inner journey takes from early dawn to late evening and Fray Luis questions me as I slowly trudge through the great portal of the old abbey, wondering if I started later or if I have been beset by bandits on the way. I answer always no, and yet cannot explain why a five-hour journey has stretched into fourteen.

Indeed, there are entire days spent when suddenly at twilight the muffled scraping of my bowl beneath my cell door brings me back to the confines of my world. Exhausted I move to the door, quickening my pace as I reach for my bowl, repeating my thanks and my requests. "Thank you, brother, and please, if you could see your way to bring me some writing materials." And always, with a pause, there is a silence through which I pray for an answer that does not come. Never comes! Why? Why? Why?

The sun's rays reaching my back send soft warmth through me and slowly ease me from my misery. It is so easy

to just let myself go and dream of days gone by and revel in those splendid deeds already done, moments of memories meaningfully set in time and place so easy to be referenced and relived. But now, the pressure of an eternal present is pushing and pulling through my person, stretching each and every part of me until I feel like a bow about to break, a tension that creates no music but a silent scream that echoes through the hollow recesses of my soul, scraping, scratching, severing soft seams so difficult to mend. A yes! Always a yes! And then a course is set that seems to stay only until a lapse of time gives birth to No! No more! Not now! Not ever!

Never do I want to be without what I need now. I pray for peace and set before me a course of action that, if followed, I hope will reap the Golden Harvest of Your Presence and place me upon the altar close to Thee participating in Your exquisite Mystical Body.

The wetness of my tattered tunic turns cold, and lifting my tear-filled eyes I search for signs that tell me of Your Coming. There is nothing! ... How can it be done? What must I know to be able to become that perfecting spirit serving man and God in such a way that lends credence to the past, purpose to the present, and promise to the future? How can I be free to be that positive presence when they hold me against my will?

I could be busy with my brothers, moving with word and deed across the land spreading love and joy to others, ready for the challenge of the order. But here I stay, separated from the world, isolated from humankind, a wretched soul, forgotten and abandoned, sealed in a cell of mortar and stone, my only source of scenery.

Heavenly Father, what a bleak enclosure for a person such as me! I can't stand this anymore. I have so much to offer to the world and to You. Give me but an opportunity and watch the many things I will do. All I need is for You to create for me that freedom though which will and act are one, I ... I ... As if rocks, sensing their participation in The Process, a

muffled hollow's harshness confirms a message that constricts and condemns me to my hold as Your words echo back, again to me, "*Not my will but Thine be done.*"

Weak and weary, eyes so bleary, sinking to my cell room floor, I have reached the depths of an abyss that threatens to engulf me and end forever this nightmare of confinement that has robbed me of my senses and driven me to despair. I cannot go on. I will not go on!

Slipping silently into an exhausted slumber I drift in a sea, my body being now at rest. My body has been broken and my senses have served only to enhance the pain and suffering of my solitude.

### Act II – Scene III

My spirit, now sensing itself free of my encumbrances, sets sail on a journey of its own. Moving quickly, it feels with satisfaction an exuberance that shows no bounds and seeks no source. The heights and depths of all there is are now at its disposal and not wanting to tarry in this desolate hole a move is made to flee and enter freely the eternal world of tomorrow and forever. With the strength of seven suns there comes a Light forging through the mist and haze that surrounds the senses of the soul and there for all to see is *The Pathway to The Divine*. It seems so clear and easy now. The Path is illuminated by a brilliance so blessed that the spirit shivers from a sense of loss ... and seeks to protect itself from the blazing brightness that threatens to consume it. And still it wants more. Attempting an ascent, it begins by measuring the perceived pitfalls of The Path and departs upon the steep slopes of Mount Carmel.

Seemingly a simple journey, the slopes hinder little advances of the soul. Success seems assured as the soul winds its way through rock-strewn crevices on the way to the summit. At last, an especially precipitous piece of path is negoti-

ated by steps chiseled in the stone, each representing the cardinal works of mercy ... the soul recalling full-well the intense labors of hours spent in confessionals of the monasteries and convents of the Order, kneading the dough of unleavened souls of the brotherhood and sisterhood, it encounters no difficulty and scales them. A feeling of sheer delight enters the vast infinitude that circumscribes the soul and embellishes it with a strength of privileged purpose that pushes on through the ravines of the Ascent, finding with each twist and turn the weight of the long-forgotten corpse is only a fading memory. A new-found freedom possesses it and progress is oh so sweet!

When through thick and thin of rock and path a spirit moves so effortlessly there was obviously no need for flesh and bones ... and yet, there were moments when in slipping through a passage there was a pang of loneliness as opportunities arose when those special symbiotic ecstasies of body and soul sent both into raptures that allowed for a mutual growth that heightened the desire to pursue that primeval pull of process seeking everlasting union with The Divine.

And then ... a bend in the path and a sense of expectant doom still lingering at the edges of my world leaves suddenly little light. The soul is smitten with a feeling of loneliness and arriving at the turn a whole new set of circumstances slowly assume form. Chiseled in the face of the mountain are more steps ... the spiritual works of mercy. Shrinking from a cold condemning current of air the soul recalls many moments when in haste or greed an opportunity to lend itself to the will of the body and meet a need that harbored flesh was but a nuisance that sat ill with the astral preoccupations that filled its wonderings. Simple small acts of compassion and assistance brushed aside in moments of sheer self-centeredness ... lost forever in the trackless time of life, leaving suffering beings to encounter their own solutions or to perish. Why, when need was manifest, did the universal will of humankind shrink and

private desire drive the soul on with only visions of the heights?

There were many moments when friend or foe had called and waited for that lift of kindness, seeking from a similar soul a second of repose to catch a breath and then push on in desert, field, or mountain.

The soul retreated from the icy chill that swept the stairs and barred its path ... "*With whom, for whom and by whom*" was this trial to succeed? Suddenly a loneliness so deep and profound that the very bowels of the heavens felt its sadness penetrated the depths of the soul and from journey almost ended it rushes raging in its solitude on a return from those creviced slopes to seek and enter a stone-bound cell and there to find a broken lifeless form expired in its vain attempt to pursue a course demanding from The Divine the solutions to all its problems. *Now Is Everlasting!* ...

Slipping silently into that beaten battered body, a union is cemented, a rebirth, a baptism of desire, all done with His Loving Heart, bathing that sacred cell, cleansing past from present, piecing together broken flesh and spirit. Opening my eyes, I see again the soft gentle undulations of the cell's stone floor and scattered round about are several small golden seeds lifted gently from some source and placed here now for me. Stretching forth my hand, I now realize that I am imbued with a new strength of will that says, "Yes! I coincide with a purpose. I am a part of the Mystical Body of Him Who Is! I am part of the Redemptive Process. *I live now, not I, but Christ lives within me.*"

Picking up the three small seeds I slowly sit and sense the soreness of my body. Hours spent sprawled on the stone floor have left tracks of time and as the pain subsides, I give thanks for each and every ache of my body and my soul that tells me I am always here with Him now.



Act III – Scene I (7 months later)

I breathe out, “Thank you God, the Father.” A brilliance abides within myself and within my cell. The Ascent of Mount Carmel has been made; the path that stretched to the summit is scaled. I now move from peak to valley and return in one soft descent or astral flight. And here with Thee I lie, with cares forgotten among the cedars, reposing on Your Chest, my house being now at rest.<sup>1</sup>

The last months seem as seconds in the shifting sifting sands of life, leaving little that holds form for days and months. There were periods of perfecting when the Hands of the Divine held me healing in their hollow. These touchings taught me much of me and more of Him.

There were along the way moments when my circumstance was changed. There was my new tunic at about six months, a baptismal gown worn in pious peace as I moved from lost soul to a disposition allowing Him to enter ... the movement from aggressive searcher and demander gave way to a profound acquiescence, offering my being to be used by the Inexorable to funnel and to channel, to integrate and to create a new pathway of becoming ... the remaking of myself and through this sublime sense of process *ALL IN HIM*, I came to be a goblet disposed for the circumstance of being that in time was filled to overflowing.

My daily ritual returned to me habits of accomplishment. Those hours spent in prayer and meditation bore fruit of the Divine Vineyard. Cast out were whole pieces of a selfish self that pleaded with The Process to enable it to capture the true meaning of Your grandeur for me and for my fellow brothers of the Order.

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<sup>1</sup> You might wish to read the poem from *The Dark Night of the Soul*. It is one of the best in the Spanish language.

An awareness of the vastness of the woof and the weave was all encompassing, enveloping the whole of Your Creation. Everything that I encountered showed forth with Your Light. My days became an offering of praise for all that was, is, and will become. Through a gift, it was given for me to see how each part manifested the whole and shared in giving birth and moving on to death, adding to the effervescence of Your Being. More and more, I realized the lost sadness was nothing when recalling past moments of frustration when I would plead for peace and purpose that I could understand ... when all the while the wind knew where it was going and in drying out the sands of life it was seeking life's seas to send its showers scattering life-blood to the trees.

So well I remember that last afternoon when in seeking my destruction I gave an ultimatum to be free, or to be done, and in crashing to my cell room floor I laid for hours lost in senseless slumber, my body being now at rest. It was then that *The Divine Charity* gave me to myself again and yet I was no longer me. I was that piece of metal forged and melted in Your Eternal Living Flame of Creation, one with You. A part of *THE ALL* that served to give rise to me and others and to those sets of circumstances that create cultures and civilizations, moments in the movement of The Process. Through it all runs an Eternal Melody, a soft gentle piece that passes unnoticed to the multitudes and yet seeps through the pride and position of them all at times when sustenance is needed.

When finally, I awoke on that fatal fertile day, that day when I found lying on my cell room floor, three seeds. They were to become for me a bridge over which I passed to commune with The Process and to listen to that Universal Hymn as it is hummed incessantly and celestially by each and every representative of The Creative Process. As I picked them up the three seeds settled into my hand, and clasping them to my heart I held them to me as precious pieces of Your Gift. Tucking them in a torn pocket of my tunic I reserved them for

those future moments when I would be better able to give and to receive.

Then, I gathered myself and slowly through a painful process started piecing together a mosaic of perfection that would allow this lump of flesh and bone, endowed with a searching soul, to meet and mesh with *Your Divine Will*.

The horizons of Your Creations are so vast and forever gendering, it was all that I could do to move in pathways that were Yours, and mine to follow. So much to know and I presumed it could be mine ... I wasted many moments seeking pieces of the puzzle of creation, thinking I was getting closer to some comprehension of Your Concert. And in all of this my being slowly became aware of the importance of the self and the integral role that was mine to play and when in search of other's being, I was not producing my clear note. I gave to You my most miserable me and You fashioned – through Your Omnipotence of Love – Your Servant, who with Sacred Purpose now exposed, became a soft ripple in the pond of time and who, with the gentle undulations, moved through the depths of Your Creation seeking and savoring that which kept me on the Path and that which was mine to do ... that which produced a harmony with all that I had hoped to know and all that in my wildest dreams was mine to do.

### Act III – Scene II

Finally, then, in that twilight-time when bowl is left and parchment slid inside with pen and ink, I scurry from my sentinel-post-window beside the door and praise my unknown benefactor as his sloping shoulders slide gently from my view and are, yet again, gone without a word. I quickly snatch my treasures from the floor and moving to my pallet, I kneel and smooth the pieces of torn and tattered scraps and carefully roll them together and tie them with a thread from my tunic. Then, cradling my new opportunity, I spend my nights in profound

recall, searching the crevices of my mind to pull forth those small messages that gave form to my feelings and to my understanding of those precious dispositions that had joined me to my journey.

Trembling hands sought the pen of my mind as night silently slips into dawn. I wait for those first rays to shed light upon my possibilities. I organize my creations so as to treat of the first and then of the last. And in Your Name, I begin.

Proceeding from the early days of my imprisonment to the moment of the present, there I stop and wonder ... was this foolish effort to compose a gesture tossed into the arena of the many searching souls a mere beam of light that illuminated only me to You or You to me?

Could I suppose that through my narrow window on the wonders of Your Worlds, I was capable of creating a road map of being that would serve to guide my fellow brothers and sisters of the Order, and those many other perplexed travelers who sought sustenance from the printed page?

Nevertheless, I must write them all.

And so it was that I was given to understand that in the sharing of my moments, I would indeed create those seconds of repose sought by seeking souls from members of their kind, that they in time would move towards an insight of their own that while similar in purpose and intent could only be discovered and assumed by, they, themselves.

There was with my writings a hidden gift to those who shared my map of purpose, a most fundamental present to my kind. If only they could learn to live and be as one with self and circumstance, *a forever and all abiding Love* would govern their endeavors and create for them and others a clam sea. Then, what I was to bequeath to them would be a small example of a permeating faith, that while pushing from the eons of forgotten moments, also pulled me into myself, into others, and into You. A meshing with the Mystical Body that

breathed forth a Profound Hope to all that is, was, and would become.

It was also given to me to know that while I should continue creating road maps of being's becoming, I had to personally participate in a process of communion that served to cement the parts to the Whole and the Whole to all its parts.

### Act III – Scene III

It was done when in a moment of need those three seeds fell from my torn tunic to the floor. I slowly kneel and pick up each grain of wheat, precious symbols of each generation, and holding them in trembling hands I bless them in Your Name and almost without thinking ... guided by Your Hand ... I place one on my lips and draw it into me. As I slowly chew, the hard shell breaks and releases for me a soft gentle substance that seems to serve as a cement that would when crushed and kneaded give rise to fuller being, bringing closer union to the many parts of Your Creation. I am at once the soil and the sea, the sound and the silence, a song set free from the bondage of the process. Somehow, I have been set free in lifting the leavening of life from its resting place and through it put in contact with *THE ALL*.

I stay long hours kneeling on the floor not knowing whether in the body, or out of the body, just residing in the presence of The Real. Finally, the presence of The Process pulls me from my kneeling pose and places me before the altar of the present ... an offering to the world of Your Eternal Now. I am suddenly given a baton and asked, no, respectfully told, to marshal those creative moments of my circumstances and conduct a symphony for all to see and hear. With trembling hands and heart turned free it comes to me that only if I allow things to be as they are could I ever hope to produce the measures of a melody. I move and am surprised to find that a unison of purpose is manifest in the process and that if I only

do my part there will be room and time for all. An ecstasy encounters me, and I know ONE is ALL and ALL is ONE and everything that could be would be done.

My two remaining seeds I share, casting them through the iron grilled grate to the world outside. They go to ground and sky ... one falling from my window ledge I sense would, in penetrating parched soil awaiting the rain to come, send roots into the fertile fields to feed fellow travelers as they seek and search. The other catches and lodges in a stone crevice hiding from all view when suddenly from sky turned gray, a dove appears and swoops to retrieve from process's pull that seminal source that serves to feed each new generation. Off it flies in wind-blown flight to shores unseen and lives unlived, disappearing from my portal view. I somehow know that if walls had tumbled from my cell, I would have seen that dove sent with love from high above to seek and to set free that seed for You and You for me and all in need.

Turning from my windowed ceiling I move to door and latch find loose. I spend the day in silent prayer and pry the plate from place to place and patiently wait for my jailer's nightly visit to transpire and then, anxiously awaiting his retreat, in one great pull on that oaken curtain I am set free to be with my brothers and to live in word and deed. It is all a You – in You – through You – by You – that all life must be lived. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

The Rules are from *The Game of Life: A Player's Manual For Executives and others*, by Don Davison, Ph.D. (Zirahuen Publishers, ©1995, 2005, 2009, 2011, 2017, <http://amzn.to/fOrqEi>).

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<sup>1</sup> The seasons of the mystical path (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, *The Spiritual Canticle*, and *The Living Flame of Love*) were only a part of St. John of the Cross's literary production during his incarceration. And as with all spiritual paths, there are those moments of painful aridity when suffering seems our only reward. Mother Teresa's writings also share her deepest moments of trials and triumphs.