

GRACE
&
GRATITUDE

THREE BOOKS
OF
POETRY

BY
Thomas Perez Jewell

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M O T H E R
P O E M S

BY

Thomas Perez Jewell

THANKSGIVING DINNER WITH MOTHER, 1961

Four children and a big bowl
of popcorn to share
our feast.
Who else knew but we
hungry pilgrims
of the Long Beach projects.

MOM'S ELEMENTARY MIX, 1965-1967

Every morning, except Sunday
fresh milk arrived on the porch:
 one bottle white,
 the other one chocolate.

Mom knew how to stretch our sweets.
She'd blend them fifty-fifty
 to make twice the treat:

One gallon of mixed elixir
 divided at breakfast, poured
 for her four little quarts.

MAKING SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING MUCH

Meals for us were any one's guess
between my years from two to ten:
 Feast or famine in a can?

From whose kitchen
 did we eat or not:
Aunt, Uncle, Neighbor, friend, or
 from our struggling Mother's touch,
making something out of nothing much?

ONCE AGAIN AT SUNSET

A smoggy, L. A. sunset
during a hurried exit
after daddy violence,
against highway headlights,
all of them stand frozen,
hand in hand, at
the Foster Freeze entrance,
One Mom, transfixed and
penniless, soothes her upset
four little kids wanting
a soft-served-ice-cream.

MOTHER'S FINAL VICTORY

Ordered to the car before his beating began:
All four of their children 6, 7, 9, and ten.

Father's brand new '66 blue Malibu against
Mother's temporary refuge
as we cried in the car.

Father's flailing fists merciless against
Mother's soft flesh
as we cried to ourselves in the car.

Father's rage against
Mother's revulsion
as we cried in the car to ourselves.

Father's return to us empty handed after
Mother's bout and victory.
Ordered from the car before
his final departure.

NO DEPOSIT, NO RETURN

I remember Mom,
the countless times
you wouldn't let your husband,
the policeman, reject
your sons after their transgressions.

I remember Mom,
after that same "Cop" threatened
not to accept your youngest
(one year in exile)
back into the fold. But,

just like Pepsi-Cola's policy then,
you demanded from the "Man":

"If, at our home,
there's no deposit of my son
to you I won't return."

COLORFUL LANGUAGE

Enamored with colorful language I am.
I learned my first curse words
 from my Mother's tongue.
I felt the sharp "k's" when
 her expression flushed red.
I knew what she meant
 when those led with an "F."
Her hand like a brick against
 this "little shit"
for repeating the "F"
 and the "k" with the "uc."
I learned not to cuss
 in the hear of her ear,
and I'll only be colorful
 when my want isn't clear.

THANK YOU 10,000 TIMES

The nights of ten thousand times
 wet from the storms of dread
 throughout my childhood.
Not on purpose did I piss the bed.

Your compassion not condemnation offered
 relief to my shame and
self-hatred well into adulthood.

I hid from the fear of being exposed
 as I felt captive by my brothers and
 step-father's threats to tell the world,
but you helped keep my accidents secret
 as if you felt responsible for my problem.

I never asked you if you blamed yourself, nor
 if I caused you any harm in the process.
We rarely spoke of your first husband's violence
nor of my father fears and frequent nightmares.

GRATEFUL GRADUATION
(SJSU, 1985)

In that joyful moment,
diploma in hand, and pride aroused
I asked my Mom in silence:
 "Every sacrifice worthwhile?"
I turned and through an audience
 of thousands found
my answer in her smile.

NO LONGER THE ROLES WE PLAY
(for Mom)

We were not ourselves on those waters toward Molokai.
We were each other aware for the first time:
One in the communion with all there is in paradise.

Coming from painful pasts and horrific obstacles, we arrive
through eons and eons to being here alive.
We feel our mutual yet unique wounds, not as proof,
but to understand their depths of hurt to heal,
as all of them at once in the winds just disappear,
and washed anew, from all residual identities, we
as ocean spray, dissolve any separations or divides
from this moment's perfect now.

Even after death one year hence, and
from this current prison I am now in, we
still embody, as everyone else,
a sacred presence that's every place.

MOM'S LOVE

I over-heard
my mom cry to a friend
on the phone
that her older sister
didn't want
her four "brown" children
in her home.

I felt the weight
of this epiphany of hate
against my skin.
Inside my world turned.

The hurt cut deep
deep enough to touch
an unconditional love
awaken in my heart.

MOM'S LAST VISIT

Her death not yet,
but I knew it would
be the last time
 I saw her
in the flesh.
Sitting in my glass
 casket, we
sat brow to brow
connected by a phone
that buzzed as if
long distance, but
we transcended
 that obstacle
as usual and laughed,
laughing not at
 but with. . . .
An understanding passed
 between us
given and received
 received and given:
Our history for over half
 a century:
What could be said
 that wasn't always?
What needed doing
 that isn't already?

MOM'S UN-VISIT

Inside this womb,
as if never delivered,
I died before my birth
waiting for your visit.

A SPECIAL BOND, 1961

I still feel
Grandma Sally
holding
this grandson's
hand
in
the middle
aisle
on the
crowded
trolley
downtown
bound.

THEIR SLEEPING GIANT
(for Grandma Sally)

Grandma's presence
 before the Beatles
 and after Sputnik,
brought bathrobes, slippers,
 and other strange rituals
 into their lives.

Besides her power to quash
 their father's rages, every
morning she would mask
 herself with cold-cream
 and rest on the floor
with elevated feet while

her grandsons watched
 from the hallway, with
 six wide-eyes, quieted by
 the possible reprisals
for waking their sleeping giant.

"BEFORE I DIE"
(1979)

During lunch with Sally
ten years before she died,
she said, "you are my favorite,"
between her half-sandwich
and banana cream pie.

So proper and confident,
no stranger to table talk:
"Before I die," she offered as casually
as reporting the weather:

"If I'm put into a home, I want
to be senile by then and
not know what has happened."

Was she giving me the power not
to allow my grandmother to endure
this hardship?
Did she see the ability in me to prevent
this from happening regardless
of life's circumstances?

I smiled with all the assurance
I could muster at twenty-two
feeling every bit her number one
and promised her this would not happen.

TIMELESS NOTHINGS, 2010

Watching Grandma
 play solitaire
at her kitchen table
as she dots and dashes
 the cards while
chatting about notions
 and nothings to her
eight-year-old grandson.

Now I, in my prison,
forty-five years later,
 shuffled and solitary,
layout my cards in kind
and listen as her nothings
 become some things
about serving time.

HANDMADE TORTILLAS

(for Francisca Perez)

Standing at the stove,
Abuelita cooks them
to perfection;

she places the sacred wafers
into fresh folded cotton
por la familia.

The joy of her joys
forever rapt
in her handmade tortillas.

GRANDMA'S GARDEN

Lemon, lime, kumquat, and avocado trees,
all of them used in Mexican cuisine.
Shade for the lazy days and great
obstacles during "tag" for dodging cousins.
Bougainvillea on trellises bloom.
Summer roses cover the filled-in pond
where Aunt Maria's memory is honored
after she drowned at two.
All of the above and ivy clinging to the chimney
keeps us surrounded in green and defrays
the sun's slanted rays for the countless
lifetime's we play.

OMA EMMA

Oma Emma's portrait adorns
these halls of remember:
Shining like a tropical sun over
Hamburg and beyond.
Hands from a van Gogh wrap
themselves around your world
wherever you are, wherever she is:
An artwork unowned, yet possessed
by everyone in its presence.
The namesake of our first born daughter:
In her, Oma's spirit lives with
Picasso depths, colors in Kahlo,
textures by Klimt, and the curisoity
of Leonardo's genuis.

FOR KARIN'S DESPAIR

The day you shared:

"I must say goodbye to my Mother's life."
You encircled my world
inside your despair. . . .

Stay open, open though

your heart wants to close.
Grief releases as long as you mourn:
Begin with forgiveness
and end with thanksgiving.

GRATEFUL IN HER PRESENCE

(Meeting Mo. Teresa, 1982)

No pedestal, no halo, no fear
as she reaches to receive me
with both hands outstretched,
I become her world.

Mother's eyes deep and focused
as she mirrors mine and
with surprise I hear a voice
so familiar whisper:

"So ordinary the sacred,
so easy is love; so simple--
forgive everything."

DOWNWINDERS, NEW MEXICO

(for Odeta Halliman)

Downwind from that nuclear project:

"What harm could be done in a vacant desert,"
said one official from the U. S. Government.

That vague plague turned, in
nineteen forty something, into
the toxic winds of cancer and
Einstein's gravest fear.

Downwind from their assurances:

"The mushroom clouds are clear
according to our best estimates."
Just ask the ghosts of Hiroshima and
Nagasaki, just read Oppenheimer,
just grieve my dead grandmother,
and every other downwinder. . .

LIQUID SELF-ADDICTION

Mom and son witness,
while counting cars
on their way to school,
a hunched-over drunk
releasing his vomit.

This little boy asks:
"Why is this man
spilling his guts
all over the street?"

Mom pauses then responds,
embarrassed for him,
"Hon, that's a complex victim
of a liquid self-addiction."

AFTER HOURS WITH HER ROCKING

Sitting with a mother's rage
 who lost her son to murder,
I died inside her survival screams
 fighting the impulse to utter
words that would only ruin
 the refuge of her silence.

ACCEPTING THE OBVIOUS

I try to tell them Grandma,
 every chance I get,
 after your death's arrival
 and beyond,
but few of the living will listen
 when it comes to dying.

"Death has nothing to do
 with going away. . . "
 Wisdom says.

That is how it was when you
 dissolved
 into the formless form
 that is our oneness.

This truth that life and death
 are not separate
becomes less an argument
 and more a matter of breath
when we, moment to moment,
 accept the obvious.

LOVE'S RELEASING FREEDOM
(for Mom)

All the lessons in your life,
 difficult and tragic,
you embodied all there is
 with your living and your dying.
And about your son, the one
 shamed by his own actions,
who put himself in prison?

So hurt by this catastrophe
you offered him compassion
 and love's releasing freedom.

A MOTHER'S MUSIC

A mother's voice,
for a lifetime attuned,
now a whispered song,
dying to talk
to her imprisoned son.

THE LAST CALL?

How will this and that life
and that and this death meet
each other on the phone?

How will we share,
 our different worlds
in a whirlwind of emotions,
 about what's to come,
 about what has no words,
 about what can't be spoken?

YOUR DEATH'S REVELATION
(for Mom)

My heart's torn open
and cut into pieces
by the shattered glass
of your non-existence?

What does death reveal when
there's no more image to see
but the love that's always been
inside of me.

JANUARY TO JANUARY
(for Mom)

January to January
another empty measure
from your death event to now.
After the acceptance where
did I go from there?

I found your death not separate
from this life I live alive.
No need to change, or cling, or crave
for a reality any different.
Embracing what is now reveals
both life and death as perfect.

AFTER YOU DIED

After your death,
Mother's Day, Mom
is now Other's Day,
when I celebrate the
communion of all Beings
and take within my inhalation
all their pain and catastrophes.

Then I release with my breathe
every peace and blessing that exists
within me,
because your was is now
my unconditional giving.

IS WHAT WE AWAIT DIFFERENT?

(to Mom)

My words fell short in her death event.

"Did she hear what couldn't be said?"

I still wonder.

"Does a coma suspend infinity's begin?"

"What awaits our wait for that final breath,
and everything's after?"

YOU HAVE SHOWN ME HOW

New born into this world again
within your labor's love as Mother
Nearer than near you were and are
that I may live forever.

You died first to show me how:
 Embracing death alone, alone
as naked as we are born.

CELEBRATING MOTHER

The pleasures of births and pains of deaths--
the gifts we gave each other.

In my current existence
you gave this day to celebrate.
Every gift you gave yourself,
as every gift received, is what we share.

When I learn from you, I now understand,
it is the Self, in its Original Bliss, unveiled
who speaks these truths with our own voices.

Our lives are in each other lived.
Your body's dead but Self remains.
Your death's the greatest gift you gave
removing one more obstacle.

I am the We of our you.
We are the Self as you and I.
You are the I am as are We.

FATHER
POEMS

BY

Thomas Perez Jewell

MY
FATHERS

THANK YOU FATHER

Thank you Father for how you
fathered,
faults and all, for all
that did and
didn't happen,
for all the fathers who fathered
this son,
and who now embraces
all the fathers
he's become.

MY FATHER'S WRATH, 1962

I dropped a whole half-gallon bottle
of chocolate milk after attacked
by lightning and thunder.

I ran seven blocks plus
for many more years
after,
fearing my father's wrath
for the remainder of my past.

SAFE BY SILENCE AND STEALTH

My first father memories:
the fear and shame still
oppresses me in the dark.

This little boy sometimes safe
by silence and stealth,
hidden from the angry voice
and Mother's cries for help!

ALL THAT EVER IS

The fact you tendered
 in my heart and head, Father
includes everything I need to know
 this moment--
 all that ever is. . . .

Both of us born in the same
 Los Angeles hospital--
 nineteen years apart--
even at birth inseparable
 and timeless.

FATHER'S FIRES

Only seven that summer,
nineteen sixty-five, when
Malcolm was gunned down
 by his own kind,
when the smoke from the fires
in Watts ignited my nostrils
and curiosity about conflict:
 Why does black and white take
 opposites sides?

The word violence wasn't yet
 in my vocabulary, but
I knew what it meant even then
 from my Mother's black eyes
and her "White Knight's" regrets
after his own fires and bloody riots.

AFTER ALL THE YEARS, MY FATHER

After all the years
of early absence
and in terror of him,
my savior?

After everything a life contains
and offers,
after every one a life involves,
my father is my laughter.

CHAVEZ RAVINE, 2008

My favorite team since nine.
In this moment, side by side,
two complete lifetimes sit:
Dad at seventy-two and I
fifty-one.

My birthday gift to him
returns as mine--
our first baseball game
as father and son--
at Dodger Stadium.

OUR BIRTHDAY ANTHEM

(for Antonio Perez)

Today, my Father turns
the age I'll be
when I'm released
from prison.

Seventy-nine years
does not contain
who he is
beyond what he's been.

Nor, will this lifetime define
who I am
always already
beyond what I've done
since fifty-seven:
Being One and timeless
with whatever happens.

LET ME COUNT HOW MANY

Let me count how many houses
together we inhabited
like a ladder descending up.

How long did we survive
between the rungs
while living with
your cycles of violence?

Let me count
how many fathers
inhabited those houses
like a ladder ascending down,
and how long they lasted
between your absences?

AS HE IS, AM I

Face to face, brow to brow
embracing the father
I used to hate
being afraid of
as a child.

Now I love him
as he is,
in all that I am now,
willing,
though unable,
to visit his son in a
too distant prison.

I SEE YOU MR. JEWELL

I see you Mr. Jewell not
as the step-father from hell
I thought cruel.

Too many years as opposites
made you easy to blame until
I felt in myself your strongest weakness
as I embraced my weakest strength.
Now no longer strangers
to our very own sameness.

AN ATTEMPT TO WIN APPROVAL

Eleven years old in
full football pads at practice:
uniform and all
but no cleats to wear, so
I played bare-footed
and humiliated.

My pride would not allow
myself to be poor, so
I begged these questions:

Was this worth
my new father's approval?

Did I choose a sport
this family couldn't afford?

I didn't fully understand the cost,
so I quit this nonsense
for a less expensive attempt.

FRESHMEN FOOTBALL, 1971

Life lessons offered for the practice:
Why not?

"Don't be timid," my Step-father warned
going into the mix.

By season's end
I hit as hard and true
as the best of them,
and found some wisdom
in doing it.

THE DEATH OF CLIFFORD

Sitting in the midst
of his uncertain fear,
my third father's father lay dying
in intensive care.

We called him Clifford, never
grandfather.
I called my step-father "Dad"
but that couldn't penetrate the circle:
Treated kindly but not allowed,
not even during death's dissolve.

I stood as a silent witness on the other-
side of their circumference.
After hours of taking turns between
the gasps and fits for Clifford's breaths
the family left him to rest, alive and dying.

While driving to his daughter's home,
on the 605, I said to Dad at 3 a.m.,
"We can go back and stay with him."

"No, that's OK," he said without
further explanation.

ABUELO'S FUNERAL, 1962

(for Macario Perez)

Buried alive
 until out of breath.
His closed casket set
 in the living room--
mourners came and went
 all afternoon.

So much to drink and food--
 a feast. What fun
playing tag in the yard
 until out of breath
with all our cousins.

GRANDPA LYNN

You died cancer ridden
before I was born,
yet you live
through my Mother's love.

What wisdoms will you teach
your namesake, now being
your daughter's second son?

GRANDPA LYNN IN PHOTOGRAPH
(circa, 1950)

Leaning against a wife
You would love and leave
with ten children shared.

I want to ask you--
my Mother's father:

"What doesn't
this picture capture?"

FATHER
FIGURES

UNCLE ERNIE'S FAREWELL

We three brother's went to see him
after many disappearing years.

Now weak and belly severed as
he joked to choke back the tears:
"You boys are so grown, and
your visit's my miracle."

We talked and laughed
until overwhelmed.

Helping Ernie return to bed,
we shook hands farewell,
once again little boys in his care,
half in denial, half aware.

ANOTHER A L S MORNING

(for Paul, Sr.)

The end of his life approaches;
for a year I've watched him
fade from his former frame:

Muscle by muscle, nerve by nerve, and
after he's fed food through a tube,
he brings a lit cigarette to his lips
and every drag equals
more disintegration yet less pain
as his eyes reveal
a worthwhile-sweet-surrendered
release from prison.

MY UNCLE MANUEL

Many times my savior
 when ridiculed or shamed.
One time he found me
 after spanked and crying
when I wet Aunt Junita's bed.

He took me aside and said:
 "It's okay mijo, take this dollar
but don't spend it all in one place."

With a smile, riches in my pocket,
 and with all the honor
 I could muster, I didn't.

ODE TO FATHER ROGER

My Catholic Zen Master
A Buddha with a collar
Your love had no opposites
Even when I betrayed your trust.

You just loved me as your own
And forgave me as your son.
Faith, mercy, and compassion
You preached in every sermon.

Every soul your life's mission
Every heart: Closed or Open.
Human with spirit attuned
A servant true and present.

"Bless me Father. . ." their request
Your timeless love responded
As you lived this sacred truth:
"The Father and I is you."

THE JOYS OF BEING FATHER MAURICE

"I don't like to read," I confessed when we first met.
You simply led by reading two or more chapters
nightly before bed, then "slept with the angels
in the arms of Morpheus."

"The simplest truths are simply lived,"
you'd say before you served the daily lesson
with a master's aplomb. You made
the past as real as your own presence
with history as your pulpit
and humility as your charism.

FRANK THE PROPHET, 1980

Under his summer stars
 on the porch--
the lessons he shared
 still reach my ears--
Truths of a "Southern Comfort"
 prophet.

"Whatever begins in this life
 will certainly end,"
he'd proclaim, "and
 everything is just
another now, so
 don't be afraid my son."

With toothless grin
 his "Goodbye" always warned:

"Stay awake if suddenly stirred
 by demons or angels
 before the dawn."

FATHER CHOW?

My brother Chow--
a former fellow seminarian and
benevolent schemer in
this seamless universe.

His smile bridged the gaps
between our customs and language.

He knew more English than
his Chinese would allow.
He knew how to save
more than he consumed.
He lived his life
as more than "mine."

I wonder if he took his vows
into the priesthood?
I wonder if his heart's as pure
as it was then?
I wonder where his vows
have taken him?

THIS HERE AND NOW

(for Father Richard Fry)

A friend and a Father
 in the ordinary everyday
with a heart that gave
 and gave and gave
until he gave himself away.

He did not give to get
 it seemed but gave
such ordinary gifts received
 that give all life its everyday
beyond beyond's beyond
 this here and now.

FATHER BOBBY

No doubt a Sacrament.
Eros and Agape in the flesh
A certain scholar in flushed,
 befuddlement expressed
while a humble servant of the Church.

Yet, and yet. . . he touched
 the deepest truths in me and
the truths in others on the catholic path.

Yet, and yet. . . he welcomed
 open rebellion beyond
 the Church's doctrine
from Aquinas to Sartre to Eckhart, and
 in every paradox he embodied.

PERE HENRI

Life's occasions
when we journeyed together
became sacred celebrations.

The slightest concern never
missed his attention.

One anxious moment I asked
as we traversed
the roads of Gabon:

"Are we getting closer
to our destination?"

"Every second, my son,"
he teased,
with a saintly grace,
as we laughed ourselves
into infinity.

CAREFUL COUNSELOR

(for John Crane)

We met on the same path
to heal ourselves from different pasts
while training to help others heal
from their early "death sentences."

We became good friends
and careful counselors
to persons with AIDS and
together spent years
touching the untouchable
in the light of their dying,
while reaching the unreachable
in our own unfolding.

FATHER LEO, "THE ARRIVED"

Did this teacher arrive beyond
my being ready
for his arrival?

My world turned topsy-turvy:
True now false, false now true.
No longer ensconced
in a life of denial.
Encouraged, by you, to live through
the trials of body, mind, and soul
being in love with the truth
rather than my will.

During my seminary years
a presence emerged within me,
pre-existing our friendship,
your counsel, and my ignorance.

Though somewhere distant and obscure,
you remain present in every disaster
or celebration.
We share a union that can't be broken.

B E I N G
A
F A T H E R

IN FREEDOM'S BEING

My daughters dance ecstatic
in a crowded meadow
filled with daisy faces,
making color-wonderful paths
and circles

as the wind through them advances.

Each by each, one by one, laughing
they surrender all fear
into this moment's freedom
simply
the whole world's
far and near.

NUENGAMME: NAZIS BRICK FACTORY, 1993

Present barley fields across the way
whisper and weave in the wind, and
express best the vast numbers of the murdered then.

I stand in shock and weep
at the furnaces where
the Nazis burned their bodies but
couldn't destroy the evidence.

While clutching my baby girl,
I holler from my heart without sound
to honor every victim's scream,
for every single life inflamed,
for every one to live in peace, and
to awake my own child's awaken.

SAN FRANCISCO ZOO, APRIL, 1997
(for E & T)

Two little girls
plus one father
tame the zoo
in pretty April.

Sitting in tandem
wide-eyed aware while
pulled in their wagon.
A wink at the elephant,
a nod at the lion,

just close enough
for constant comfort
 yet not too far
for wild amazements.

EMMA ON HER PONY, 1997

Round and round
 so worlds go,
so goes Emma on her pony,
and every revolution
 she says "hello"
 implies "goodbye."

Moment after moment,
 over and over,
forever at the center
 of her own unfolding.

OUR WINTER IN JULY

(Mt. Lassen, 1998)

Winter entered summer
as we climbed
Mount Lassen's summit.

You girls grew ecstatic
when all we saw was snow.

Always a grateful moment
when your children express
their joy.

DISNEYLAND, 1998

A "Magic Kingdom" midnight,
my two daughters fall asleep,
exchanging one dreamscape
for another.

With one on each shoulder,
I gather strength for our exit,
carrying them forever,
through every world's entrance.

CIRCLING THE WORLD

Watching my two tiny girls
wisely ride
the rides at the carnival.
Their fun's just preparation
for all future frights in life
and for the simple joy in
laughter's own delight.

Daring the Caterpillar and Tilt-
a-Whirl, going over and over,
circling the world,
in the midst of the thrill,
now that much wiser.

HAND HOLDING MAGIC

Hand holding magic imprints
the memories of comfort and
gentle guidance.
Little palms meet parental fingers
and squeeze as
the dance of living continues.

So, don't impose your rigid wishes
upon your children's wonder.
Allow yourself by allowing them,
true wisdom to discover.

A TIMELESS TREK

Our afternoon at Bernie Falls,
we descended the switch back trail
with your four and five-year-old pony tails.
We entered the spray, the roar, the
cascading waters undaunted.
On rocks, we climbed and explored. . . .

What was your wonder?" I wondered
as the father in awe. Your little feats
during that adventure,
without complaints, surpassed all
expectation as we crossed together
that bridge across this memory's forever.

TWO DAUGHTERS AND A FATHER
(1998)

Our afternoon on Mount Lassen
you may or may not remember,
this pinnacle in my fatherhood:
exploring worlds for your discover?

After lessons at the museum,
we drove sky bound through various
terrains, season by season, until we reached
the summit side by side by side,
climbing the deep snows with wonder
in mid-July.

A MEMORY REPEATS ITSELF

I am my kindergartner's
 graceful feat
as her little feet repeat
 the same beat in my memory
during the identical tempo
 of the Mexican Hat Dance
 forty years prior.

DEL RIO, TEXAS, 2000

Awake to face the sun
 every desert dawn.
We three as one
 when we lived
in that house
 on the cliff.

SEA CAVES ON THE OREGON COAST, 2003

Within the smelly cave
 from protected ledges,
Sea Lions slide and slip into the ocean,
transforming awkwardness to grace
 for relief, for feeding, or to tease.

Whatever their business,
 they communicate in sync
with musical barks and brays and bellows
 as we three explorers witness and live
 their ever playful natures.

AS NOW THEY ARE, 2003

Clear sky, sun and wind
on the Oregon coastline,
in the middle of their childhood,
my daughters and I agree
to climb this lighthouse and
view the ocean Pacific.

As we spiral the stairs
we share, step by step,
our adventure:
"Who will be the first to see?"
We ask one another
while in its center.

I looked at them so crystal clear
as if awakened from a dream.
I see my daughters as I did then
as true and near
as now they are.

A WONDERFUL TRUTH, 2011

Feeling desperate
missing my children and
their every laughter
through all the stages of them
embracing selves.

Then remember
we're not separate.
Now at peace
with this wonderful truth.

MAKING JOYFUL SPLASHES

(Cocoa Beach, FL, 2008)

Our first swim
in the Atlantic Ocean
--warm and wonderful--
a realized dream
as the joyful splashes
during your first baths.

TOMMI JOY'S PIANO RECITAL

You and the music
realized
on the tips
of your fingers.
Spirit attuned
in communion with sound
in splendid transcendence
once awkward now elegant.

AS TIME DISSOLVES, NOW EMERGES

(Puerto Vallarta, 2009)

Learning as we go
 how time dissolves, now emerges.
My daughters and I visit Mexico
 and explore a small village nested
 in the Sierra Madre's, bearing
trees on slanted slopes, and houses
 in wisdom's silence.

UNDER THE MAZATLAN SUN, 2009

Our mutual embrace of Mexico
 shared in a tropical paradise.
My daughters swam the luxurious pool
 then sunned and surfed
 at the beach for fun, and while
painting their plaster masterpieces,
 each of us reached
our unique depths of joy
 unter the Mazatlan sun.

INTO FOREVER'S HERE

(Los Altos Hills, 2009)

Along the path,
we three walk and laugh
 in and out of shadows
and in this instant realize
that the light of love we live
 emerges from within.
Then adventure as one further,
 deeper into forever's here.

REMEMBERING NOVEMBER'S SWIM

Who swims in these November conditions?

We three did
after the sand castles we made amazed us
at low tide.

Wave aware, one after another, we stayed
present together until the sun disappeared.
This changed the script for my children,
perhaps a lifetime lesson, moving them beyond
just conventional wisdom.

Someday when others are ready to condemn
an errant human being for being
what he or she couldn't be, they
will intervene with their mercy,
remembering our November swim
on a deserted beach
in thanksgiving's ocean?

A TIMELESS WALK

My daughters and I
 among the redwoods rest
sharing the silence, shadows
 and timelessness.

We feel together
 its one embrace as
wisdom arrives with
 a sun-filtered grace.

Humbled in their immense
 height and breadth
as we rise to meet our life's
 ever deeper depths.

ROUND TRIPS FROM CA TO TX, 2007-10

Alone is what I carried
in between my travels.
Always am I there
as time and space unravels.

MY FEARLESS CHILDREN

After too many schools
 in one year and
too many years at different
 schools, I learned
as the new kid in elementary:
Never call attention to myself,
never sit anywhere but in the back
 of class, and
never volunteer even if I know the answer.

After years of unlearning these lessons,
 what a relief to discover,
that my children, as first and second graders,
 didn't suffer from my childhood disorder,
as I watched them seat themselves
 in the front row among strangers,
raising their hands to respond
 and fearlessly ask their questions.

SEPARATION FALLACY

Napa downtown
after four
in springtime.

We three
would
dance between
the concrete planters

in boundless leaps:

First here and then over there--
within our everywhere

at five
and six and
forty-three.

We're still these moments
in memories relived.

Remember?

Feeling the air
beneath our feet
together releasing

every separation fallacy.

BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF MIND
(for Emma)

Being ever present transcends
all space and time.
I am where you always are
beyond the boundaries of the mind.
All across the country
as you run your competitions,
I am the subtle gesture
that supports your "I can do it."

I see you Emma everywhere
a great athletic warrior:
Your face, your heart, your soul
all of them so beautiful--
complete in being only now.

All across the Universe
I am there before the race
in your joy's anticipation
for your run to every place.
And there am I at and after
your finish line arrives,
when every fiber in us smiles
at these moments ever ours.

A FATHER'S DAY REMEMBERED, 06-16-02

"06-16-02" captured in the corner
of a favorite photograph taken
in San Francisco.

Two-sun-kissed
ageless and beaming daughters send
their smiles and memories to their
content but lonesome father
living with others alone, yet
living alone as every one.

EXCEPT FOR EVERY LESSON LEARNED

Father failures
Children's wounds
All the pain and suffering endured
will dissolve into disappear
as far as
Love forgives
what is.

WHEN YOUR DAUGHTER TURNS TWENTY-ONE WHILE YOUR IN PRISON
(for Tommi Joy)

Beyond what circumstances
human fears contrive,
my devotion to my daughter
remains unconditional.
I continue to feel her tiny fingers clasp
the hands that brought her into this world.

Our phone call's brief, a single ring,
her voice answers all my questions and
my heart opens to new born joys.

Perish all thoughts, my dear,
creating walls that seem so real;
Love as true love loves, letting go
into no boundaries.

TO MY ONCE LITTLE GIRLS

We are together in every one we touch.
Memories of my little girls grow deeper
with each wrinkle as I age.
Even though the lives we live seem distant,
our love remains as near
as once our hands still hold
everything we've held together.

YOUR STEPS AS MINE
(for E & T)

With you in my heart
regardless of this structures
pain and punishment,
I am kissing the world and you
where I stand and
every step I walk shows
your steps as mine walking
my steps as yours.

MY HEART EMBARCES EVERYWHERE THERE'S YOU
(for E & T)

You don't need to visit
I honor your path and ours.
You're already in my presence.
I understand the risk and dangers
of being imageless and condemned.
A dad in prison doesn't fit
any wholesome image you'd want to live.

So never wait to live,
while being patient with yourselves,
allow your selves to be what is:
The truest gift that you can give.
The greatest gift one can receive.

I HEAR YOU MY CHILDREN

Always at the edge of your shore
even though in prison.
I am everywhere you are
existing with you in
no boundary's now.

TO MY DAUGHTERS

In you and through you,
I finally reached the place
that has no place,
finally learned the question,
that needs no answer,
finally arrived to everywhere's here,
finally feel loved
as now I am.

WHO WILL TELL MY DAUGHTERS?

As I prepare for my nightly ascent
but do not descend into this life again:
Who will tell my daughters I am dead,
yet still alive in the lives they live?

GRATEFUL
(for E & T)

Grateful I am
for having held your hand
before the letting go.

Grateful am I
to have kissed
your timeless face hello.

Grateful to have been
your father
in this awakened life.

Grateful for the gifts
you gave
that only children give.

Grateful for the joy to die
as you and I have lived.

A NOTE TO MY DAUGHTERS ABOUT FREEDOM

A note to my daughters
from your father in prison:
Use this circumstance as I am
for your selves to awaken.

ONCE UPON A SON

"Red car," the two words
James clearly knew at two.
His mom met us at the park
as usual, driving blue.

He and I swung on swings that afternoon,
as his mother, my recent former, arrived.
Saddened by that final retrieval,
I stood in choiceless surrender,
not his father, as he cried:

"Red car, red car,"
while being belted into blue.

ON SASCHA'S PATH

If ever there was a boy who dreamed
you were every dream you dreamt.

We met when you were already seven
an early entrepreneur
collecting rocks and
polishing them for sale.

Stone by stone you laid your path.
Pain by pain your life so made. . . .

If ever there was a step-father
who didn't love completely, I am guilty.

My reasons make no excuses, yet
know my boy, you are my own story.

I loved you then as now I love being
in the heart of our shared journey.

Accept this embrace my son.
Our spirit is one in this world of many,
holding us close so far away.

THANKS GIVING TO MY SONS

(for Sascha and Ethan)

We weathered several storms of mood and temper
in our younger years when I was your step-father.
What hurt remains among us?

Is there anything we can't heal with everything forgiven?
I was not aware as now I am.
I did what I did to protect and preserve.
Now I do what I do to allow and release.
May we be at peace in the oneness we share.

Where is your awareness now my beloved sons?
You did what you did to be loved and to flourish.
Don't blame yourselves for my ignorant failures.

How do you do what you do in your lives?
Are you as happy as the happiness you are?
Did you know that you're still in my present joys?
I wonder if you remember the joys we once shared
as I wonder if I am present in the pains that you suffer?

My intention was never to hurt you on purpose.
My intention was to give you what I didn't get as a child.
Instead, you gave me lessons to what I didn't get as a dad.
So I am humbled and grateful for what I learned from my sons:
How to father my daughters and your sisters in love.

FATHER'S DAY, 2014

For every father whoever dared
to live another childhood
along with his son or daughter,

risking everything there is
for those particular hurts
reserved for parenting--

awakening countless pains
and hidden resentments,
as a child and or teenager again
held captive by selfishness
until released and forgiven
through genuine care
of his own children.

This is how we learn surrender.
This is how our love's discovered,
this is how our living's ageless.

P A S S A G E S

T O

N O W

P A R T O N E

BY

Thomas Perez Jewell

5" BY 5" BLACK & WHITE PHOTO, 1960

Looking into and out from
those little boy eyes,
that sideways gaze,
camera awakened,
captures his shirtless frame:
shocks of wavy locks
in full length jeans,
right hand stuffed in pocket.

A keen confidence shows
in his smile
taking aim at the world
he's certain to compose.

"BIG OTIS," 1961

"Big Otis"--a flexing
cereal box bear--
my childhood hero.

Emboldened by him
I ran on purpose
into a picture glass window:
Crash! Splat! Pow!
stuck waist deep in blood
awaiting my rescue.

A STILL MEMORY, 1961

Easter sweets remain a blur
in our turquoise house on the corner.

We wore new suits, we three brothers,
with feathers on our hats I remember.

Sister was a baby then dressed
in everything pink, so pretty.

Don't remember the church service,
but we went to that strange place together
dressed for a masquerade party?

And in the stillness of this memory rests
a rare glimpse of Father's dark figure
somewhere in the mixture,
and Mother, as always,
is everywhere in the picture.

FROZEN IN MOTION

(Family photo, c.1961)

Three little boys belted
in the front seat of a Model-T
at Knott's Berry Farm.

Transported then frozen in motion--
captured in rare tranquility from
Mommy and Daddy wars.

SELF-PORTRAIT, 1962

Ever stubborn about
being one to please,
(even when refusing
cottage cheese), but
I only took my young defiance
as far as
I could sneak.

GONE THE CATERPILLARS, 1962

A spy in the mirror
 watching Mom trim
her eye-brows day after day.

When all by myself,
 I shaved my caterpillars
 with her razor.

Naked eyes and
 not a single drop of blood.

"Well done," reflected this
 five-year-old son.

TWO LITTLE DEVILS IN LYNWOOD, 1962

Fireworks nearly all year.

Across the street
from our trailer, we
scaled their fence, dumpster
dove and stole
"Red Devil's" discarded duds.

We didn't consider the danger,
so overwhelmed
by the flames and desire
to set our lives on fire.

BEHIND GEORGE'S MARKET

At six I questioned:

"Why waste another nickel
on a phone call home?"

Did you know that one nickel
wouldn't make another phone ring
in nineteen-sixty three
behind George's Market?

"Spending ten cents would not
be worth it," I thought in silence.

At 59, I've decided:

"All talks over-priced unless
it meets the action
it purports."

WHAT PLAY REVEALS

(Sawdust Pit, 1963)

First we flip-flop
 head over heels, then
laughing drop
 two feet deep,
lose ourselves
 again and again
in hide and seek.

We bury ourselves alive
 in our own must,
uncovering without death
 infinities of dust.

ALWAYS PRESENT

In that second grade classroom,
we observed the larva transform
and discovered what's inside
"the can't be seen" after the metamorphosis.

I am still there in the lesson
as the Witness always ever-present.

EARLY SIXTIES IN LOS ANGELES

If you worked
in the industrial district
in Los Angeles and ate
at the Mexican Food Shack
on Spring street,

I was that six-year-old boy
cuddled by the floor
aligning his soldiers
for navigating wars.

A fictitious General commanding
an otherwise negligible reality.

PEREZ FAMILY BBQ, 1964

Savored memories
so present--
homemade ice cream:

Fresh lemon rind mixed
with vanilla bean magic.

HALLOWEEN, 1965

"Beggar's Night" dared--
a special treat,
then Halloween.

Not looking to trick,
just candy seekers
in costume,
running from the pain
for a sweeter rescue.

ON EL SEGUNDO AVE, 1965

In the aftermath of our disasters's
every lack. Finally
a life arrives
without the "tyrants" violence:

From homeless to fearless to shoeless
all summer--
Three boys and a little sister filled
with less of wanting more
on El Segundo.

A SPRING OF MEMORY

A spring chilly-wind keeps
the memory of three barefooted boys,
from the barrio, bravado in full bloom,
running through blocks of empty lots,
full of damp March grass, carefree
and endless into this world's future.

STOLEN FLIGHT, 1965

Soaring with my kite
at the end of my string
when bruised and battered
by three bigger boys, I
was peed on until drenched
then robbed of my fleeting flight.

LINDBERGH ELEMENTARY, 1965

During this monumental
summer school session,
I learned two survival skills:

How to create art
with nature's objects and how
to compose haiku.

FINALLY MY RIDE

There are no Christmas mornings to remember
until I am eight years old--
Not one, until my second father's arrival
in nineteen sixty-five.

Three bicycles under the tree
for my brothers and me.
The candy-apple-red "Sting-ray" said:
"Tommy, I'm yours!"

What joy still resides inside
that sad little boy.

THIRD AND FOURTH GRADE WARRIORS, 1965-67

Good Michael Nelson

my boyhood friend not forgotten.

You and I celebrated a world of fantasy and fiction:
Third and fourth grade warriors conquering dragons,
rescuing the down-trodden, traveling to the moon,
waging wars in your backyard, playing soldiers and
being heroes.

We made wooden swords, gave ourselves nobility
as Kings, Knights, and Lords.

We forged battles for imaginary territories,
made treaties and ruled kingdoms.

Free in the moment's reward, living and
and dying in the genius of play
without any boundaries.

ARDEN THEATER, 1965-67

I lived for the movies
when I was a kid and
witnessed more than
I ever misunderstood.

DARING THE PLUNGE, 1965-66

Daring the plunge
 so young,
wanting water wisdom
 against deep fear,
wading until ten to swim
 from the shallow end
 of my unsure world.

RUNNING AWAY AGAIN, 1965

Nothing new in my threats to escape
my father's constant violence.

I'd hide outside, under the steps,
and await my family's panic
but that never came, so I

would return, as if I never went,
tear stained after
another failed attempt.

SLAUGHTER HOUSE MEMORIES, 1966

Not imagined
bloods visible everywhere
like at home through childhood:
Dried blood stinks still
and sticks to slaughter house
memories since
eight-years-old.

BEAT OUT OF BITS?

Uncle George said he'd give
Junior and me four-bits each
if we finished picking-up
the shingles out of his reach.

We completed our share of the bargain
and for hours planned
how we'd spend what we'd earned,
but he never delivered the silver,
nor any worthwhile compensation.

THREE LITTLE BOYS TO GRANDMOTHER'S PORCH, ALMOST. . .

I still feel the flings
and extra spins
riding the "Hammer Head"
in circles as a Trio
after walking miles and miles
on little boy feet
through city streets to reach
that parking lot carnival
to Grandmother's porch, almost. . .

PUDDLE SURFING, 1967

When the rains came to the neighborhood
curbs disappeared and turned
to rushing rivers.

Fully clothed against the storm,
my brother and I belly dove
the puddles and rode the waves
into the wet and wonderful.

A MORNING REFLECTION, 1966-68

In the morning, I saw
the playground across
the tracks in Watts filled
with black children and
never made the connection
about our separation.

I never asked the "why?" question.

Was I color blind or just
the contrary, while driven
to and from
my all-white school called
Lincoln Elementary?

SANCTUARY IN THE PUBLIC LIBRARY, 1966-68

My childhood church was the public library,
which insulated me from harm and hurt.

A hushed and hallow space
surrounded and embraced
this little boy
with the wonders of books and
a fully felt presence
in its all inclusive universe.

IN FRONT OF THE SAN SIMEON APARTMENTS, 1968

I smelled the fear before the fight then
stood frozen in the face of violence
just like Dad's attacks on Mom--
a killing every time.
When does it end?

Two young women locked
with fists and kicks
pulling hair between curses until
both got stabbed in the back
by a century plant.

All three were bleeding, in tears
and broken into a hundred pieces of need.

A PAPER BOY'S JOYS, 1968-69

Along my daily route,
I charted every phone booth
at motels, gas stations,
and corner stores, discovering lots
of unclaimed change
in the "coin return."

Then, I'd purchase a treasure's worth
of paradise:
Candy bars, chips and
ten-cent sodas.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WARS

Eleven different campaigns
from kindergarten to sixth grade.
Never knowing my actual rank,
I remained the token scapegoat:
An open target for attacks with hate.
Wounded by their strikes and insults,
damaged only by my own self-shame.

GROWING UP MEXICAN

As a kid--
 who understands the hate
 of prejudice unless taught
by your family from the crib?

I didn't realize why
 I stayed a victim of it--
ridiculed with cruelty
 at recesses non-stop at
eleven schools until twelve--
 until I learned my birth name
wasn't "Beaner, Greaser, or Spic,"
 and claimed Tommy Lynn Perez
as the son of a loving mix.

"DOG-PATCH" DELIVERIES, 1968-69

I recall a small paperboy at ten
fearful, forlorn and frozen
against the "Dog-Patch" bullies:

A frequent target for jeers
and hits and kicks and human spit.

How did I survive such torture
on a daily basis?

Sometimes I numbed myself until
invisible, or luck would come
in the grace of a good Samaritan.

VIRGINIA WEBB'S EXAMPLE

How often do you see a miracle occur?
"Love your neighbor as yourself."

Virginia Webb brought this gift to bear,
and made her love in our hearts deeply felt.
A neighbor to this day, she remains
a mysterious stranger from ages ago.
All we know about her, then and now,
is the several games we shared at
Dodger Stadium.

My brothers and I took turns
accompanying her.
All expenses paid for a joy we seldom
knew as boys.
A joy we could never repay
unless like Virginia, our neighbor,
we became.

APRICOT THIEVES

Earlier than birds
we had to be.

Three apricot thieves
before dawn.

Our breakfast from a tree,
reaching for the sweetest
fruits,
one in the meet
of our limbs.

K-MART AFTERNOONS, 1969-70

After breakfast--cereal and toast--
we three brothers searched
for pop-bottles to return--
two-cents each-- all morning long.

Our money harvest from vacant lots,
alley ways, and freeway exits yielded
enough for the afternoon's purchase:

Three popcorns and three large "Icees"
for three hungry hunters
on Rosecrans Avenue.

LITTLE GILBERT, 1970

Little Gilbert arrived
in my yard after school,
helmet on head,
chin in strap
for protection against
his awkward gait.

My little helper that didn't help.
As I rubber-banded my papers,
he undid the work--
His mind impaired to less than six
and just as mischievous.

Gilbert knew my quiet goodbyes.
With paperbags saddled
and ready to ride,
I'd wave and weave on the street,
and he'd sidle after me,
like a broken bicycle
not quite in time.