

John Raley

A POETIC JOURNEY IN MID-LIFE

February 1st, 2013

A Book of Poems

As a middle-aged inmate incarcerated for the first time, I felt compelled to write poetry as a creative outlet, in lieu of stage acting, which I normally do on the outside. The majority of these poems were written in my cell late at night when I had the time to think and reflect. Each of them was written in ten minutes or less and mirror my thoughts and dreams at mid-life.

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MOTIVATION

Motivation in its purest form

Takes away all idleness of time.

For it can make a mountain move

OR take a tool in hand.

Let it send its fierceness forth;

A testimony to all that's real.

But if it breaks and speaks no more,

Then lack of drive it stills.

Send it to every lazy man

Who only sits and dreams.

It can be lost in a moment's breath

And unrealized 'til too late.

SAILING

Beautiful blue water stretches out before me,
 Never so inviting as it looks right now.
 Looking past the pier I see
 My strong sail boat thrusting its bow.

"Climb aboard," my boat calls out
 As I walk gently to its side.
 Let me step down, ropes afloat
 To find peace, warmth and hide.

Breaking free to find the farthest point,
 My sailing journey begins anew.
 Just like the first time for anything;
 Anything that takes one from dark to blue.

Sailor, sailor, my mast a blowing
 Across waters, waters not knowing
 Of right vs. wrong, blown by winds so strong
 Making up for mistakes made my whole life long.

STORM

A storm is brewing
Wind, rain, thunder, lightning come
Always to destroy

STORM

The rain began to fall
Wavebreaking fast to shock us all
When lightning strikes through clouds
And thunder roars so loud
Repetitious pounding, then to crawl.

AUTUMN

Away, away, on this early November day
To points unknown to me at this time.

On a day that changes from blue to grey
Giving me change from stress to sublime.

All the leaves that fall in spirals
On the ground they land as friendly rivals.
To a purpose left to serve the soil
Of all that's brown and good to boil.

Autumnal skies with light that grows shorter
Forming a sunset with crimson border.

Light winds blow across the field
Nurturing pumpkins and corn for kids to feel.

A message that time now falls back
From summer's solstice now off track.

A shooting star on October night
Blessing beasts to a farmer's delight.

Up at dawn to see the frost

A harvest moon just gone, not lost.

A candle burns of scented hue
Lifting cracks and love anew.

WINTER

A winter's breath grows cold
On a dark December day.
And the howling of the night time wind
Reminds me of all that is grey.

Blessed is the sun that forms a blanket
To cover earth's sins and people's bad habits.

Let us wander in the winter sun
For the warmth we so desire,
Looking at golden skies and a victory well won.

March on winter soldiers and with bright lights in hand
Resplendent in their tivery, radiant in this land.
For night time skies bring cold but warm breath
And a tree of lights speaks of peace and Xmas wealth.

Angels with their golden wings
Sound their trumpets loud.
And a fire that burns in the farmhouse
With its family snug and warm.

Oh, let this winter stay for now
To bring forth peace and quiet.
With a son's sigh and a father's yawn
To bless this perfect night forever.

OH, HOLY NIGHT!

Oh, holy night!

But, what if the stars don't shine bright?

What if love is just a word,

Never practiced, never heard?

A Ymas wreath that should plaster with hope
Fades into a background of loss with a hanging rope.

A cry that went unheard
Now brings tears to those who mourn.
A loss so great that it touches us all,
But no one here saw the horrible fall.

A candle burns this holy night,
But it lacks a scent of warmth and night.
For those who come to weep and pray
That the memory of that rope will fade away.

SLEEP TIME

All babies asleep in their rooms tonight.

All babies asleep, for sure.

Never, ever to be seen/held again.

Not again in this lifetime or another.

Not again in my lifetime.

To whom I cared the most,

To whom was loved the least.

Never on any day could an impossible dream

Make such an entrance, make such an impression.

For love begets us all,

Both now and in the next time of life.

BLUE LIGHT

Light, light, or where is the light?
 And why does every hour feel like night?
 I'm not an avenger or a man espousing hate,
 But my enemies crouch upon me to seal my fate.

There was once bright light circling my head.
 I once knew the difference between living and dead.
 But I walk like a zombie from room to room
 Without familiar compassion but a sense of doom.

A sister who lies, connives and spies
 Another who spits salt in my eyes.
 The wounds, once superficial, cut deeper with time.
 No water to heal, just cheap bitter wine.

Friends gather 'round me preventing the smoke;
 Smoke that may kill me or at the very least choke.
 I have never, ever been held captive before,
 Yet my sisters conspire to block my door.

Bring me to stand, get me up from my knees.
 Bring me to God, who I'm eager to please.
 So find the switch on the sturdy wall
 And turn on the light giving me reason to call
 "Light, light, blue light!"

A SON'S PRAYER

Come dad, come to me this night.
Take me in your arms, for I feel sadness in my heart.
I truly miss you more than eyes can tell
And I want you more than ever to speak to me.

A bright light shines for me to see your face.
You're in my room, you're filling up my space.
You tap my love and spirit and a wall breaks down.

A well deeper than a river
Holds my heart in your love.
And I know of only goodness
Your peacefulness and mercy shine from above.

Don't let vengeance overtake my heart
In a family somewhat broken, perhaps forever torn apart.
A world without you in it
Pleads for least rendered prayer.
And so on this night that trembles,
There's more than closeness in the air.

WANDER, WANDER

Let these shoes carry me home.
A home I so much want to belong.
Open doors long since shut.
Send in spirits to lift me up.

Down the sidewalk into town
Crossing streets clogged with cars so sound.
Past shops, eateries, banks and flowers
Taking time, time consumed by hours.

Wander now to side streets broken,
Cracks in concrete once unnoticed.
Bumps and ditches along the way,
Not inviting me to stay.

Stalled and still, not fluid and easy,
My wandering ceases, captured in breezes.
Push me forward, some wandering spirit.
Push me harder, out of this granite.

Back to walking, some hope had come.
Speed up, move faster, now to run.
Home's a calling, wander this way.
Get me home at last and seal this day.

LOSS

Loss, loss, the pain of loss
I've never before known such loss.
Even when my dad passed away,
I gathered the courage to face each day.

My crime speaks a thousand new words.
Ugly, nasty, dirty are words that I've heard.
How do I clear this sin from my chest,
To heal the wound and put my conscience to rest?

Nights are restless and cold in my bed.
I need respite to silence the thoughts in my head.
Missing my friends touches my memory.
Learning to love stretches me briefly.

See, my heart has been broken by what I have done,
When it's usually another who breaks it and runs.
Oh, let me patch up and move on from here.
Just don't call me stupid, the loss is severe.

TANK OF DREAMS

Come on, car, drive me away.
 Put a dent in the road on this hot summer day.
 I left you behind in the bar last night.
 Hit 'em' about it puts a cringe in my mind,
 'Cuz baby you were for from that "one of a kind."

I'll go as far as this gas will take me.
 And without you beside me, it's wait and see.
 Down flat roads, up steep hills
 Alone on the road with all of the bills.

Here's 10 AC in this piece of treasure,
 But a dream that's hot defies me to measure.
 Maybe off to Tinsel town I go
 With a stop in Vegas to take in some shows.

Desert fun and fancy aren't out of line
 And I'll take that boy to task over a bottle of wine.
 Bend winding road, let these tires do their stuff
 For a dream once smooth, then gritty, now rough.

Come on, car, drive me away.
 Vegas was fun, but I ain't gonna stay.
 It's onto LA where that bright sun can blind
 And where my dream rests under that HOLLYWOOD sign.

SPIN TIME

Oh, Barb, what more can be said?

I, too, had changes that spin in my head.

What I dreamt and then got are two different things

And I'll never get over my losses extreme.

I'm gone, gone, gone away with the wind

With gin beside me and a seat belt holding me in.

Up on some rooftop looking down below

Where those wheels took and left me, a place I don't know.

Turn, Turn, spinning in my tracks

I look over my shoulder ignoring the facts.

I have a life with its strengths now in slumber

Twisting slowly and deceitfully down my strong back.

I want to move forward, wearing a crown not a hat.

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

O, wicker, wicker, this Texas time of year.
Egg nog, cookies and greetings full of cheer.
Come now, it manages its joy despite its stress.
Come now, it eases the year into rest.

O, starry night, shine down upon us all.
Let feelings of love break thru the concrete walls.
Walls encircling hearts and minds spread wide.
Walls bringing friends closer, no longer to divide.

Of love truly comes this Texas to behold
And angels appear magically, penetrating the cold.
Snow could fall on Texas Eve, aplenty on the ground.
Fox up at 3 AM and my house breathes not a sound.

Hail to Texas magic, candles lit on table tops.
Wreaths of green and red ribbons smiling brightly, set to stop.
Then all goes blissfully quiet as heaven opens up
To take a child's heart to drink from its cup.

WHISKEY SONG

Hey, whiskey bottle, hold me tight this winter's night.
My arms are too weak to hold you for once in my life.
I think about you, whiskey bottle, every day and more.
You always made me stronger as you opened my back door.

That pretty color in the glass sends me to the bar.
You want to linger longer, I'm not driving that far.
Dance me to the floor, let those eyes rest upon me
Creepin' up my body, what you do is what I see.

At 2AM, whiskey bottle, you're pumpin' tall steam.
And I got more room for comfort, more than what it seems.
Cast your dye of brown and ice upon my loose lips.
Pour yourself easily down my throat 'til I say quit.

I've had my wars and compromises with your fate,
But I've never turned my back on you, you're my one
eternal date.

All those party dolls come and go,
Seeking desperately to take your place.
But your strength is too familiar.
You've never, ever lost this race.

WHISKEY SONG cont'd

Hey, whiskey bottle, work it now til dawn.
Let the January morning keep me nimble, make me strong.

PROMISE

Don't let a promise keep you still.
It will fade and lead to something new.
A promise is as a promise does,
But it lets too many things grow cold,
Leaving room for all that's old and tired.

So, let that promise come
And take all it wants
As Fall and Winter come.
Bitterness and a promise can be one and the same.

STARS

Stars shine bright on this cold December night.
With Xmas come and gone, the merriment lingers on.
What dreams rest in stars is not yet known,
But all in heaven mystically confirms what I own.

I tread around the room now, as if waiting for him.
His shadow of so sparkly, never call it dim.
"A star to wish upon is what we read," he says.
So I look up from my balcony, holding tight and shouting "Yes!"

Make no sound or silent wipe of hope.
Simply light a candle, then release me from the rope.
Lift the candle up, reaching for a star.
Then lower it down, never looking from afar.

Moving towards the heavens with an eye on life's breath;
Breath blowing on a star, choosing laughter over death.
Do not squander what's been given. Do not wander in the rain.
Take a moment to look up. A star will take you past the pain.

ALREADY GONE

It took one smoldering moment
 For you to captivate my heart.
 The vow to always stay together;
 No walls to wedge us apart.

Ain't it funny though what sunshine can bring.
 A castle on a cliff couldn't hold a wedding ring.
 Trees that swayed, then brought those clouds
 To cover folder skin and a shade of feeling proud.

French doors so fragile that a shake measures force,
 And your iconic defenses blend subtly on our course;
 A course of love emboldened by desire, want and need,
 That truth becomes apparent, two hearts set sail to bleed.

Your then sudden exit from love never contained
 Struck me like a slap, a feeling of betrayal masked with pain.
 If that door was so easy to walk thru and leave,
 Then fool forbid my rendering to all that I believed.

WHO'S WEARIN' THOSE STILETTO HEELS TONITE?

Oh my, my, heaven help me give a sigh.
Friskey whiskey on my pillow
Angel lips and frosted shadow
Make my heart a weepin' willow.

Six inches and more
Please don't pin me to the floor.
Get in this and satin that,
All that's missing is your cat.
Swallow pill and go to bat.

Heels wearin' wheels rollin' up my spine.
Gently, roughly, will marks be left behind?
A scar to heal or one to stay,
Get off my back and walk away.

I do want you to walk my line.
Six inches or more will do just fine.
Black and shiny with sparkle to spare,
Maybe not love but, hey, I'll know you care.

RAIN

Falling rain that blinds my view
Keeps me safe this day of disappointment.
No good news comes to help me through
Another day with so little to do.

Rain from clouds that thicken with time.
Rain that nerts the goodness of warmth.
It takes too long to see the sun,
And I feel like the only one who cares.

Rain that chills the air of November
Leads to snow on the ground in December.
I've lost faith in grey to blue,
And I'll never, ever get over you.

Rain... rain... relentless rain.