

***Living My Life As an Artist,  
an Autobiography:  
True Stories of Art, Love,  
Family & the Creative Process  
Told in Poetic Form***

**Rick Doble**

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# ***INTRODUCTION***

## *About My Auto-Biographical Poems*

The man who writes about himself and his own time  
is the only man who writes about all people and all time.  
~ George Bernard Shaw ~

Know Thyself  
Inscribed at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, Greece

The past isn't dead. It isn't even past.  
~ William Faulkner ~

To be a poet is a condition rather than a profession.  
~ Robert Graves ~

It is my ambition to say in ten sentences what others say in a whole book.  
~ Friedrich Nietzsche ~

About a six weeks before my scheduled hip replacement operation, I wrote a full first draft of an autobiography in prose, based on notes that I had been taking for the past year. There's nothing like a major operation to make you aware of your mortality. :)

But immediately after the operation, I started hearing poetry in my head - in fact, in the recovery room one hour later. Then out of the blue I saw an article about Peter Makuck's poetry. His collected poems, *Long Lens*, is essentially an autobiography but not in chronological order. His work is precise and yet easy to read - to me a modern day Wordsworth. After finishing his book, I began to hear my own autobiography as poems, and these works came quickly because I, in a sense, had already done the ground work with my prose first draft. Over the next five weeks while I was in rehab at Snug Harbor Post Operative Care in Sea Level, North Carolina - with not much else to do - I was able to enter the 'zone' where poetry seemed to spring naturally in my mind.

I often hear words in my head - and when I hear these almost audible sounds (a muse?, another voice?), I have learned to pay close attention. Most of the time what I hear is a heightened clear prose but sometimes I hear poetry - and when I do, the work that results is poetry.

Poetry is very personal to me. Some people think of it as a separate art form - and because of that, it is often seen as academic or difficult. Yet to me it is quite different. Poetry is a voice, a

way of speaking, perhaps an ancient or forgotten way, more like song - hence the term lyric poetry. To me it is simply just another way of writing - but one which certain ideas demand, just as other ideas demand prose or the essay form. Unlike any other form, for example, poetry has the ability to move in and out of time - to speak of the moment and the infinite in one breath. Poetry demands images and transcendental thoughts combined with dense wording and tight control - so every word, comma, space is exactly where it should be.

The stories in these poems that follow are true. They are all based on real events at specific times in my life and presented in chronological order. Over ten were written during the last fifteen years - the others were written primarily while I was in rehab in 2010.

### **Why write an autobiography?**

I had begun to think of an autobiography because I had just finished my book *Experimental Digital Photography* (Lark Books/Sterling Publishing, New York/London, 2010). With its completion I had achieved a life long goal. Since childhood I had wanted to discover and explore new modes of expression, to develop my art around those discoveries and then to write a definitive book. Now having accomplished that, I decided to look back at the path my life had taken. I wanted to understand the twists and turns that had enabled me to arrive at my desired destination which for decades had appeared impossible.

# **CHILDHOOD: AGE 4-13**

## **Divorce**

*Age 4, Sharon, Connecticut, 1948*

the day my father left  
was the beginning of my memory

before that only faint pictures  
Santa Fe  
a rattle snake they had to kill

after that  
the world sharply etched  
my brain now jelled  
so even with a child's mind  
I had clear snapshots:

Daddy in a heavy overcoat  
carrying plaid bags to our black car

coming back into the house

Mommy at the doorway

them yelling

me running, pulling on his hem  
my eyes blurred

the hard thump

as he dropped the bags  
hugging me  
promising to come back

then me standing on the sidewalk  
the old DeSoto  
starting up  
the smell of exhaust  
leaving me  
its rough gears  
as it climbed the road  
in late afternoon  
in yellow light  
smaller  
over the top of the hill  
gone

I felt a knife in my stomach  
and a taste like metal  
on my tongue

it was almost like the pain of birth



## **Teddy Bears in the Air**

*Age 5, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, 1949*

Genius is no more than childhood recaptured at will...  
with the analytical [adult] mind that enables it  
to bring order into the sum of experience, involuntarily amassed.  
~ Charles Baudelaire ~

When  
adults asked me  
I told them about an airplane  
that was always in the air  
and never came down  
it was a hospital plane  
with Teddy Bear doctors and panda nurses;  
people who needed to leave the Earth  
could be lifted up  
and given comfort

When  
my grandfather's nurse  
took me for a walk  
I told her I wanted to marry her  
and live together in one of  
those small stone towers  
that was part of the wall  
of granddad's gated community

When  
the hot dog man  
who had a cart  
on the pathway back to our house  
took a disliking,  
he yelled he was going to cook me  
like a wiener and eat me for dinner -  
so I ran home

scared I'd be caught  
like Hansel and Gretel

When  
at Christmas I went to see Santa,  
he jumped out of a plane  
and parachuted down  
to the shopping center -  
only he got tangled in  
telephone wires  
and I had to go before  
they cut him down

Then  
when I was 13  
I saw a photograph  
in an old *Life* magazine  
of that same Santa dangling in the air,  
as firemen on long ladders  
worked to get him  
back on the ground

## Heading North

*Age 7, Florida to Connecticut, 1951*

a five day road trip, long before the interstate highways

- a prose poem -

Always  
the windows in motion  
like sitting close to the big screen  
at a picture show -  
now full of blue sky  
now dark with trees, shadows and leaves  
blurry, then sharp  
sudden shafts of sunlight through the limbs  
and hanging strands of Spanish moss -  
his plastic seat hot with the sun,  
blinding

The back seat was his world for the week which seemed like all he had known. They'd left Florida and weren't going back. They were headed for Sharon, Connecticut, where he'd been born but couldn't remember.

Now was the back seat and the windows, each one different: backwards the town they had just left: receding, smaller, the road tapering away; the front blurry, cars rushing toward them, yellow dots on the road zipping under the hood, dash, dash, dash; and the side windows with their crazy geometry: picket fences, plowed fields, moving like a marching band clip, clip, clip, making swirling patterns and triangular mazes.

And when he had gotten used to the seat swaying, the constant blur, the movement from and towards, chickens and laundry running before them like waves from the bow of a ship; when this seemed normal, then they would slow down, coming into a town; and the windows would slow, and the fences would slow; and it was no longer blurry and bouncy but instead he could smell the town, the newly plowed fields, the old black men ambling in the heat, people on porches rocking and fanning themselves. At the stop light he leaned out the window and heard a woman singing in the distance, a screen door slamming, people calling to each other, people he could almost touch while the car was still, waiting for the light to change - like tasting a cold bottle of Coke his mother never let him drink, on a hot day.

Then the jangling ring of his car pulling into a station, the hard clanging tools falling on garage cement, the sweet smell of gas, the man wiping the windows to remove the smashed bugs, the bird dodo, the thin film of oil from trucks after a light rain. And stretching, getting use to

standing because now he was more familiar with motion than his feet touching the ground. And when he could feel the mud squishing between his toes, the sharp gravel on the pavement, then they got back into the car, which slowly climbed up its gears until they were rushing again and the world was washing over their windows like a hurricane in Florida. And the car became the place he was, and the places they passed through like water or air, and he wasn't sure if the world was moving or the car was moving - at least that's the game he played with himself on the third day.

When the light turned gold and the low sun made the plowed fields look like black grooves etched into the earth, they stopped at small houses with bright red and blue flashing signs. The cabins were full of walls of knotty pine, like a large play house that he and his mother had to themselves. The man they shared the drive with stayed in the cabin next to theirs. The man cooked sweet fried chicken which the boy had never eaten, and he wanted to stay in this part of the world between Ft. Lauderdale and Sharon where the moss hung like Christmas icicles, and the black people sang songs in the evenings, and women laughed on their porches. When he went to sleep, he could feel the car moving under the springs of the bed.

But the next morning they were back in motion and soon the days of movement were over and he had returned to the place where he'd been born and never felt at home. The trip was over, a memory like Ft. Lauderdale, like a dream six months later in the snows of the Connecticut winter.

## Skating On the Water

*Age 11, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, 1956*  
a rainy day in summer

Rainy days were microscope days  
when I glimpsed another kind  
of gravity

sitting at my 'lab'  
part real, part imagination  
I was looking into secret worlds  
for answers

a fly wing  
sugar crystals  
a half-tone photograph  
an onion skin  
my toe nail...

each of these magnified  
revealed a different nature

during sunny days  
I studied other worlds

lying on our small dock  
I spent hours  
watching the magic bugs  
who skated on the pond's surface  
without getting wet

and since the age of seven  
I had set out in our row boat  
each summer going a bit further  
until I had explored  
the coastline

from the mill at one end  
to the falls at the other

so on this wet afternoon  
when I looked out  
from this windowed room  
I knew  
each fallen tree where the turtles hid  
each sandy spot where fish laid their eggs  
each clump of cattails  
where startled black birds flew out

now like building a sand castle  
and imagining a kingdom  
I held up a slide  
and thought of Louis Pasteur in the movie -  
I could see my room of glass  
full of experiments  
cluttered with test tubes, flasks and Bunsen burners

then suddenly miles off  
I heard the moan of fog horns  
at the entrance to the Canal

I looked up to see clouds of mist  
painting the houses across the pond  
in dark grey  
before they disappeared

turning to my microscope  
I sliced a fragment  
from our weeping willow tree  
whose branches dripped into the pond

under the lens the cross section of  
wood cells glowed transparently  
like paper lanterns

that we lit every Fourth of July

and I knew

I had found my bearings

## Coming Up for Air

*Age 12, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, 1956*

My older brother had crossed a line  
although it would take years to unravel

seeing him above me,  
hovering on the pond's surface  
was like looking through a window  
in heavy rain

his strong arm held the top of my head  
under the water  
my hands flailed  
unable to loosen his grip

then his blurred face moved a bit  
and the sun behind him scattered light  
into knives of broken rays

he pushed me deeper  
below the water into eel grass  
where snapping turtles lived in the mud  
and where there was a darkness  
we all feared at the edge  
of the sandy swimming area

seconds went by  
then more  
then still more

I could not breathe

finally he let go  
and I bobbed



breaking from the water  
into air

he taunted me when I surfaced  
“Can't take a joke,  
still a baby with a child's easy hurt.”

coughing and crying  
my tears mixed with the drops  
that fell from my face  
I knew this 'horse play'  
had gone too far -  
after that I kept my distance

yet it would take another twenty years  
before the final bond was broken

## Snow Bound

*Age 12, Sharon Mountain, Sharon, Connecticut, 1957*  
my mother refused to own a television

That winter was worse than most  
I held a new emptiness that was  
more than my usual pain:  
the pain of a divorced family

On Sharon Mountain  
the snow fell on top of snow  
shaping drifting hills  
into the cow pastures  
and across the neighbors' yards

On the first day of snow,  
early in the morning,  
even asleep,  
I knew it had fallen  
because it was snow quiet  
before the plows had cleared a path  
and I dreaded the day of ice and wind

Yet from the second story window  
I saw its unbroken beauty  
it's whiteness cut through the black trees in the forest -  
a view that was blocked by leaves the rest of the year -  
and over fences, driveways  
roads, stone walls -  
it erased the boundaries  
that normally divided my world

And with this winter starkness  
my new pain returned

In December my mother had broken up with a man

I had hoped she'd marry,  
a New York actor

He and I had become close friends  
we had wandered the streets of the city together  
and stayed up late watching his old movies;  
occasionally he was in a soap opera  
that my mother had watched excitedly  
on a neighbor's TV -  
but now I was prohibited from seeing him

In January  
the snow fell like a wall  
as though it were the emptiness itself  
and in the mornings I cried  
and could not get up

Then like a gift  
I became sick with an ear infection  
and stayed home, away from school, for a week -  
I was glad to be alone with my grief

In February  
the snow was like a comfortable room  
and I looked forward to the feelings of loss  
I walked around on the mountain  
and marveled at the frozen falls -  
layers of ice formed from moving water  
that had become locked in place  
although the stream  
still ran underneath

In March  
my mother borrowed a small TV  
with rabbit ears -  
I said my illness had returned  
so I could leave school early

In the afternoons I had the house to myself  
and because the mountain was so high  
I could get live dramas from New York  
during the golden age of television -  
the reception at best  
full of large flecks of static  
yet I hoped for a glimpse of Donald

Although I never saw him,  
the screen had become a window  
one that took me away

And as the snow melted  
the sharp stabbing began to dull -  
so I learned to add  
this new emptiness  
to my already existing hurt

And by spring  
the pain felt familiar

## Bar Room Brawl

Age 13, Sharon Mountain, Sharon, Connecticut, 1957

Man only likes to count his troubles, but he does not count his joys.  
~ Fyodor Dostoevsky ~

Bruce and I were thirteen  
we were intellectuals  
we hated football  
we read Dostoevsky  
and we never watched *Gun Smoke* on TV

But on Saturdays  
at our secret place  
we constructed a western bar  
from piles of trash  
dumped years ago in the woods

Carefully we built it board by board  
rows of old bottles  
empty picture frames hanging on imaginary walls  
a complete room laid out  
with poker tables  
and dressing rooms for the B girls  
shelves lined with liquor bottles  
behind the bar  
where rowdy ranch hands stood one leg up  
pounding their fists demanding whiskey

When it was exact  
when we could walk through it  
and imagine the cow pokes  
in every corner of the room  
we were ready

We stood outside for a moment

like roughnecks who had been ordered to leave town  
then we burst through the swinging doors  
with heavy sticks  
and wasted the gamblers who fell  
onto their cards and poker chips  
along with cattlemen who turned to defend themselves  
but collapsed in our spray of gun fire

Next came the bar itself  
bottles carefully placed in a row  
were cleared with one swing of the wrecking stick

The rotten wood of the bar broke  
like a chair across a cowboy's back  
the saloon girls' cosmetic jars and perfumes  
went down as they crashed against a stack of bricks

In just minutes an afternoon's work was trash again

Tired and excited  
we leaned our sticks against a tree  
where we could find them next time  
and we swaggered triumphantly out from the woods

We ruled

## The Silent Guns

*Age 6 - 56, the decades 1950-2000*

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?...  
No prayers nor bells...save the choirs,  
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells  
~ Wilfred Owen, "Anthem for Doomed Youth" ~  
(killed November 4, 1918 during fighting in northern France)

In 1918  
on the eleventh hour  
of the eleventh day  
of the eleventh month

the guns stopped firing

a soldier said  
the silence was deafening  
he was not being poetic

later my father came home to a normal world  
that could no longer return to normal for him

caught between bouncing grenades  
rolling down concrete steps  
caught between the split second  
that it took for his lieutenant  
to toss them back  
as they flashed and filled the air  
with smoke and shards -  
my father had been captured

at home, his capture remained  
he had trouble holding a job, a marriage  
finishing what he started

in New York

surrounded by rush hour crowds  
he heard the scream  
of an express subway  
and dove down onto the platform  
thinking that the screeching rails  
were incoming shells

his family called him the 'artful dodger'  
behind his back

he would have been better off  
if he had lost an arm or a leg  
but with no scars  
it was left to me

like the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*  
he recited his story over and over  
and I learned it word for word  
as I grew up

too young I could only sense  
the wrongs that had been done to him  
ones that he, himself, did not understand

so the shadow of that war  
also marked me  
with nightmares of mud, poison gas,  
and corpses in no man's land

as I looked for answers  
far into my adult years



# ***HIGH SCHOOL: AGE 14-17***

## **My Education Was Interfering With My Learning** *Age 14-17, Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1958-1962*

The only thing that interferes with my learning is my education.  
~ Albert Einstein ~

Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.  
~ Pablo Picasso ~

At 10 pm my lights out  
I listened for the heavy footed master  
who stopped and checked each door  
for cracks of light  
as he descended the circular stairwell

I knew the sound  
when he hit the bottom  
- a faint echo up the well -  
letting me know that danger had passed

but to be sure  
I pushed clothes against the cracks  
pressed the blind flat right up to the window  
then covered my desk lamp  
with a heavy flannel shirt

at last  
my light back on  
the time was mine

and for stolen hours  
I could see things my way

from a hidden back-part of my desk drawer  
I pulled out an illegal immersion heater  
to boil water for tea,  
scooped loose Earl Grey into a small pot  
then slowly drank while savoring  
Pepperidge Farm cookies  
that reminded me of my mother's afternoon snacks

condemned to four years  
to my father's alma mater  
I thought I had no choice but to survive -  
but this world was not my world  
and their gods not my gods  
surrounded by rules of grammar and logic  
I craved a different realm:  
sensual, emotional, wordless  
and where I escaped to  
was my father's love  
of classical music -  
memories of evenings  
with ginger ale and ginger snaps  
as we listened to symphonies

so at midnight I played Sibelius,  
Beethoven, Brahms, Bach and Bartok  
on my ear phones -  
with no teacher to tell me  
how to hear what I was hearing

alone I learned  
to grasp directly what they were saying -  
it was just between the composer and me

and sometimes after an hour

with a piece I knew note for note  
I was moved to 'air conduct' -  
a secret I shared with no one

then  
about one or two, my freedom spent  
I tore down my world  
and fell to bed  
- homework undone -  
knowing that at seven  
I would rise again  
to shake off my lack of sleep  
and chalk up another day

## The Bells

*Age 14-15, Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1958-1960*

The bells were our prison  
deep, penetrating  
they rang to the furthest edges  
of the campus  
and spoke of obligations and lost time

The bells rang early for breakfast  
then in a series for chapel -  
lunch was announced by the bells  
and sports and afternoon classes  
and dinner, check-in and lights-out  
and the same bells counted out the hours  
all during the night

The bells seemed alive  
like a stern parent  
always chiding us to hurry  
to do our homework  
to not let the moment slip by

Each of us found a way of escaping -  
mine was to stay up late  
when the hourly ringing  
did not have the same sting  
as it did during the day

Students passed along stories of others  
who were locked in a struggle with time  
like the guy who once a month  
threw his clock so hard against the wall  
that it exploded into springs and gears

When vacations began  
we worked quickly to eradicate  
the imprint of the bells -  
within minutes of arriving in Boston  
we bribed winos  
to buy us pints of whiskey  
so we could let the alcohol wash away  
our memories of routine -  
only a few hours from school  
now safely on a train to New York  
we were quite drunk  
and the sound of the bells  
had lost their meaning

Yet back at school, week after week,  
we wondered if we could survive;  
we whispered among ourselves that  
some of us might not make it  
and then all of a sudden  
one of us fell

Toward the end of my second year  
my good friend John  
was no longer in school  
no one would tell us what had happened  
his room was cleaned out  
he no longer appeared on lists  
in classes he had attended  
no teacher ever mentioned his name

The whispers among us  
went on for days  
but soon even they died down  
yet I knew more than most -

On a warm spring day  
I had gone to visit him

I looked in through his cracked door  
"Oh, it's you Doble," he said  
He was standing in his underwear  
holding a BB pistol

Unable to move for a moment,  
I watched him take careful aim  
at an object on his desk -  
methodically, BB after BB,  
he shot away the crystal,  
the hands  
and then the face  
of his electric alarm clock

## Since Feeling Is First

Age 14-17, Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1958-1962

since feeling is first  
who pays any attention  
to the syntax of things  
will never wholly kiss you;  
wholly to be a fool  
while Spring is in the world  
~ e.e. cummings ~

Manliness is not all swagger and mountain climbing. Its also tenderness.  
Robert Anderson, "Tea and Sympathy" [about Phillips Exeter Academy]

Hazers are themselves victims, wounded souls who are acting out their own unfinished business.  
Jayson Gaddis, "Men and Hazing"

Standing up to pain  
became a badge  
boys don't cry  
take it like a man  
be tough  
is that all you got?  
give me more

as a male it was your fate  
to suck it up  
never let it get to you  
as said in *Tea and Sympathy*  
to be a "regular guy"

and not just physical pain  
but also emotional  
such as humiliation by a teacher

only there was more to it  
we thought we were just hiding our feelings  
instead we were learning not to feel

like all boys I paid lip service  
to this show of manliness  
later I realized it was like playing  
5 notes in a 12 note octave  
we were denied the full range,  
confined to the sounds those few notes could play  
as the depth of emotional chords and complexity  
were not available

we were allowed to yell at sports  
or to be angry - perhaps the easiest emotions -  
but sorrow or joy, hurt and affection  
were off limits

and then I saw the results:  
teachers whose dead-end lives  
meant they took their anger out  
on boys they were mentoring,  
their cruelty masked as a rite of passage

a Latin teacher was noted  
for taking a chalk board eraser  
and slamming it against the back of a student  
when he did not give a correct answer  
or took too long;  
often the instructor picked on the same boys  
who emerged from class  
with their coats covered in white  
- like a mark of shame -  
and the boys had to pretend to not be bothered

by my senior year I had found the truth:  
what they wanted  
was a kind of spiritual death,  
it meant that my life would be one of shadows  
where emotions became so disguised



I could never reach them

so I let some of my classmates think less of me  
because as an aspiring artist I knew that  
what I felt was at the heart of who I was

"No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader,"  
Robert Frost told us  
when I had heard him speak at Exeter,  
revered like a saint,  
that was all the permission I needed

## Inviting Chaos

*Age 17, Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1962*

That Sunday the minister  
unleashed unknown forces  
forces that still affect me today

at the church service  
required by the school  
the man I knew well as a teacher  
usually talked in the abstract  
about choices and decisions  
but in this sermon  
he told a personal story

he was in his twenties and  
thinking about getting married  
as so many of his friends were doing  
so he made a mental list of the women he knew  
of the qualities he wanted  
and began to look around -  
when out of nowhere  
he met a woman unlike any he had ever known  
who soon became his wife

it was like a revelation  
it was his metaphor for life  
and for faith

you work hard at finding an answer  
then - if you are receptive -  
the answer may appear  
at unexpected times  
in unexpected ways

more being moved than moving  
more being given than taking  
more accepting than demanding

it opened a new pathway  
where ideas and feelings  
could come to me  
like a voice in the wilderness

## Girls

*Age 17, Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1962*

The individual has always had to struggle to keep from being overwhelmed by the tribe. If you try it, you will be lonely often, and sometimes frightened. But no price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning yourself.  
~ Friedrich Nietzsche ~

I liked girls, I liked them a lot

oddly this was seen as less  
than masculine  
boys weren't supposed to like girls  
they were supposed to get what they could  
first base, second base  
they were supposed to score  
and tell their friends

but I didn't really like sports  
so these metaphors  
weren't my cup of tea -  
what I did with a girl  
was our business not theirs

avoiding ridicule, I kept my ideas to myself  
and instead I figured out how to see a girl  
thirty miles away in Andover -  
many Sundays in the spring

being a senior I knew the ropes  
and used every trick  
all of it with the school's permission:  
I got some day trips  
to count as weekends  
so I could skip church  
and take the early train

or when I had used up those slots  
I went directly after services to the station  
and came back before check-in

but that was only part of the gauntlet -  
at her school even holding hands was forbidden  
and students could not sit together on a couch  
yet we were allowed to take long walks on school grounds  
where the touch of her hand felt even sweeter

at prom weekend I brought her to the dance  
gloating a bit (I have to admit)  
since my classmates were stunned  
that she was more than just a date

at dawn  
hours before her bus  
was to take her back  
we took a blanket  
to the river bank  
where time stopped and  
our schools were memories

we kissed so long and hard  
that before I went to sleep  
that night  
I felt the press  
of her hips and arms  
as they surrounded me,  
along with the smell  
of dirt next to the water  
and the taste of her lips

and I felt her tongue  
still moving  
inside my mouth

# **COLLEGE: AGE 18-21**

## **In My Mind I'm Gone to Carolina**

*Age 17-18, Exeter, NH / Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1962*

poem title from a line in the James Taylor song, "Carolina In My Mind" - Taylor is from Chapel Hill, NC

Esse Quam Videri  
To Be, Rather Than To Seem  
Motto: State of North Carolina

During my senior year at Exeter  
forces had been gathering  
that would change my life  
yet on the surface there was  
nothing dramatic,  
more like a slight shift  
in the prevailing wind

the year before I had seen the film  
*Suddenly Last Summer*  
by southern writer Tennessee Williams  
and it spoke to me directly  
with stark poetry and ritual -  
evoking feelings almost forbidden in the north

at school I was assigned *Look Homeward Angel*  
about North Carolina and Chapel Hill -  
a book overflowing with emotion -  
and I read it in a day

then on a windy night  
I walked into town

across icy sidewalks and blue snow  
to escape for an hour at a local diner -  
as I approached  
yellow light filled the windows  
glazed with condensation

opening the door  
I was hit by a hot draft  
and a loud jukebox -  
Ray Charles was singing *Georgia on My Mind*;  
for a moment I was carried back  
to the south I remembered as a child -  
Spanish moss on the coast and red clay in the hills  
"as sweet and clear  
as moonlight through the pines"

when it came time to apply to college  
all of us, of course, wanted to go to  
a brand-name Ivy League school  
but that year, Plan B was  
the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

in late spring UNC  
was where I was headed

on my third day at the campus  
a number of wandering freshmen  
invited me to sit with them  
under a large oak in the arboretum

circling and leaning up against the trunk  
we must have looked like a Bruegel painting  
as we passed beers one to another  
around the tree  
and then each took his time  
telling how he  
ended up in Chapel Hill

I heard stories of tobacco farms  
and grandsons following in their family's footsteps  
and wondered what they would think of  
my quite different tale -  
but they all listened and laughed and enjoyed it

and although I had never been there before  
I knew I was finally home



## The Art of Hitchhiking

Age 16-19, Eastern Seaboard of the USA, 1960-1963

this particular trip: 1963, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (UNC) to Wrightsville Beach, NC

And for just a moment I had reached the point of ecstasy that I always wanted to reach,  
which was the complete step across chronological time into timeless shadows...

~ Jack Kerouac, "On the Road" ~

In May  
after Saturday morning classes  
we hit the road,  
the beach only five hours away  
by thumb (give or take)  
and the trip as much a part of the time off  
as the dunes and the waves

years before I had learned about the craft  
by reading *On The Road*;  
with no car and an urge to go  
thumbing had become a way of life  
each ride an adventure  
each trip an epic  
each sunset a drama

taking the local roads  
meant a better chance  
as the cars weren't rushing by -  
then dressing up a bit, combing my hair,  
putting on a smile and standing  
at a place where cars slowed or stopped -  
were all part of the stock and trade

so on this beach journey I went from  
Apex, to Fuquay-Varina,  
Angier, Dunn, Warsaw, Rose Hill,

Wallace, Burgaw  
and Castle Hayne

when I got to the shore  
I was to meet friends  
near an inlet  
but because they had not shown yet  
I waded to the island across

then suddenly out of the sky  
like a large gull  
a small plane glided down  
onto hard shells at low tide;  
the pilot and his girl friend descended,  
built a fire and we talked about travel

the sun having set  
I walked out into the ocean  
on long sandbars  
each step outlined  
by sea-like fireflies,  
that burst into light before fading

right at full darkness my friends  
arrived, shouting across the inlet -  
we walked back to Johnny Mercer's pier  
where we each ate a hot dog,  
a pickled egg and a cold one  
- all we could afford

that night we slept behind the dunes  
until the sun woke us  
when we rode the waves  
until the shadows told us  
it was time to go

set to thumb our way back

Duke students just leaving  
offered us a bus ride to Durham  
but we had to run to catch  
the empty seats

back in my room  
that night  
I lay in bed  
sunburned and hot

I could still feel  
the whine of traffic  
as I stood on a bridge  
and the rush of wind  
as semis passed me by

and I could still feel  
the ocean swells  
rocking me to sleep

## Sky Diving in the River

*Age 18, Haw River, Chatham County, North Carolina, 1963*

Dropping into the water was foolish  
no - just plain stupid -  
but on a dare by upperclassmen  
I had hung on a metal bar  
next to a partly-open  
sluice gate at the Haw river  
and let myself drop into the pressure  
that shot me a fifty yards  
into the middle of the stream

not that it wasn't fun  
it was sensational  
surrounded by churning currents was  
like being hurled into space  
like free falling  
like sky diving in water

for an afternoon we did this  
over and over  
never really thinking about  
the dangers

fortunately none of us  
banged against a rock  
or was pulled back  
toward the gate  
into the turbulence

yet we did not get away  
scott free  
a classmate climbed a tree  
in his bathing suit

only to find out later  
that the vine growing around it  
was poison ivy

## **Keep Your Eyes On the Prize**

*Age 19, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1963*  
the Civil Rights Movement

"Henry, what are you doing in there?"

[Ralph Waldo Emerson asked of Thoreau in jail]

"Waldo, the question is what are you doing out there?"

~ Henry David Thoreau ~

(replying about his actions, the first case of civil disobedience)

My head was on the floor  
next to the back seat  
my toes almost to the roof  
and the two policemen in the front  
were not happy

but the sit-in at Brady's Barbecue  
had gone off without a hitch

relaxed like jelly,  
it had taken two cops to carry me  
out of the restaurant booth  
and then chuck me in the back  
along with others,  
until the squad car was full

now screaming up the steep hill  
siren wailing, lights flashing  
we were headed to the station  
for photos, fingerprints,  
and a night in the county jail

in the morning we'd get a breakfast  
of thick fried baloney covered in flour gravy  
white rice crusted with melted sugar  
and coffee with chicory  
before we were bailed out

in the afternoon

non-violence had to be learned

instead of hitting back

we went limp;

and like military training

it became natural

it did not matter

if we were marching and being spat on

or sitting-in and being arrested

we did the same thing

nothing

the burden of actions, the moral choices

were on those who opposed us

upstairs above the funeral home -

before we went out onto the streets -

a preacher raised our spirits:

"Don't let them get to you

you are better than they are;

when they curse and throw rocks

look straight ahead"

however, we lost in Chapel Hill

and many of the leaders were given

long prison terms

yet nine months later

the Civil Rights Act became law

and on that day

I went to Brady's Restaurant

with my black friends

and we ate barbecue

## First Nakedness

Age 19, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1964

Naked you are as simple as a hand.  
~ Pablo Neruda ~

After months of holding you  
I thought I knew your body  
but it was always wrapped in cloth

Now, the first time naked  
I saw you unbroken  
without dungarees cutting your waist  
or the blue-red peasant flower patterns of your blouse  
hiding the simple roundness of your breasts

Your skin shown like a light  
and my breath really did stop  
when I saw you  
no longer divided -  
my eyes running freely  
from your head to your knees  
your body now continuous

Later when I continued inside of you  
I fantasized about always  
being connected  
like the Greek myth of a third type of being  
a man and woman permanently joined  
whose unity was so powerful,  
the gods became jealous -  
so they were split apart by Zeus  
and left to wander the Earth  
looking for the other

I tasted you for the first time



that hot afternoon  
and you tasted like the sea -  
our sweat was like oil  
as I slide across your chest,  
your wet hair stuck to your nipples  
your eyes screamed in silence

and your heart beat was so loud  
I thought it was my own

## **Flipping Coins With Bruce** *Age 20, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964*

It is by chance that we met, by choice that we became friends.  
~ Quote from Unknown Author ~

It was the summer of serendipity -  
after a chance meeting  
Bruce and I became fast friends;  
above the noise of the city  
we spent evenings on his roof-top porch  
listening to the lush sitar solos of Ravi Shankar  
and the complex keyboard of Beethoven sonatas

occasionally we descended down to  
the cacophony of the streets  
to Elsie's Diner  
with the best jukebox in town;  
between bites of Reubens we listened  
to Martha and the Vandellas -  
"Heat Wave," Bruce said  
"is as tight as any tune by Mozart"

on a trip to New York we scoured the town  
for a color organ  
a jukebox that displayed dark violet for the low notes  
and yellows for the high ones  
- state of the art for its time;  
it took four hours but  
we at last landed our prize  
at a small bar in the Village  
the only place with such a one  
in Manhattan

both interested in John Cage, chance  
and things that came out of the blue

we drove one night to an intersection  
and began a coin flip game:  
tails, left; heads, right  
and when three roads converged,  
we flipped twice

all went well until we got caught in a circle  
that looped and would not let us go -  
determined to play by the rules  
we kept flipping until  
finally we were released

and chance put us back on the main road

## Great Rehearsals

Age 20/23, 1964 & 1967

*Tanglewood Music Festival, Lenox, Massachusetts  
& Sharon Playhouse (summer stock), Sharon, Connecticut*

The sculptor's hand can...free the figures slumbering in the stone.  
~ Michelangelo ~

The rehearsal is where it all happens for an actor.  
~ Wayne Rogers ~

At the Paris Opera I saw the ballet  
of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*  
and on Broadway,  
*West Side Story* and Tennessee Williams

yet my favorite performances  
were rough and incomplete  
allowing me  
to see inner workings  
to see more than polish  
to see the gears  
that normally are hidden

under the soft morning light  
of the Tanglewood tent  
I watched and listened  
to Pierre Monteux  
rehearse Brahms 4th  
working his way through a forest of sound

sitting close  
and knowing the music well  
I could see sweat on the faces  
as the conductor let  
the orchestra play for only minutes  
before stopping

and clearing the path ahead  
by shaping the color and tone  
of each instrument  
merging feelings and sensations  
in delicate slow motion

at the Sharon Playhouse  
I sat in the front row  
as my adult friend Atwood  
directed a rehearsal of  
*Albee's A Delicate Balance*  
scaling it in space and time

set in a living room  
he moved actors, props and lighting  
forward and back -  
the arch of the entire work  
clearly in mind  
with his particular interpretation  
of this complex work

for five hours  
he carved twenty minutes of the play  
constructing dialogues and monologues,  
comings and goings  
rage and quiet  
while an invisible metronome kept time  
and while the meaning emerged line by line

like watching a sculptor  
pull a figure from stone

I knew I had glimpsed the core:  
two master craftsmen  
giving birth

## Seeing Stars

*Age 7-14, Sandwich, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, 1951-1958  
& Age 20, Sandwich, Cape Cod Massachusetts, 1965*

The underlying sense of form in my work has been the system of the Universe, or part thereof.  
~ Alexander Calder ~

In my room  
when I lay in bed  
I looked up and saw stars

my small room had once been a closet,  
but was the right size for a seven year old;  
my father had covered the angled back wall  
with paper that looked like the night sky -  
white constellations against dark blue  
that ran up and across the ceiling

it was like being outside while being inside  
like the planetarium in New York  
or like camping or walking on a beach at midnight  
like standing in new snow in a dark field  
with no moon

\* \* \* \* \*

when I was twenty I went back  
to my Dad's house for the winter  
and stayed there by myself -  
it was a test  
if I had the time  
could I devote myself to making art?

at the end of three months  
I had written five short stories  
and a novella I did not like  
but the point was, I had worked

and, to my surprise,  
I had also experimented and constructed  
about ten mobiles  
of white tissue paper stretched across  
angular balsa wood frames  
translucent  
some always turning  
no matter how faint the air

just before I was to leave  
I hung them in my childhood room -  
some with candles  
some with bright metal strips that caught the light  
plus a few late ones made with  
red Madras tissue -  
together they turned  
under the star wallpaper

when I had carefully placed each piece  
I moved a chair to the middle  
and sat surrounded  
by what I had made

and then I knew  
I could spend a lifetime  
creating

## Leaving

*Age 21, Deia, Majorca, Spain, 1965*

Intuition is the supra-logic that cuts out all the routine processes of thought  
and leaps straight from the problem to the answer.

~ Robert Graves ~

(who lived in Deia, Majorca from the 1920s until his death in 1985)

On the island of Majorca I became the target  
of my college roommate's mother -  
too young to understand her illness  
I only knew that she was picking on me  
so I bought the cheapest boat ticket to the mainland  
which meant sleeping on the deck overnight

at the ferry's bow  
I watched it back away from the city of Palma  
into the Mediterranean  
no ripples on the water  
long sharp lights mirrored in the twilight

I hated leaving  
and my stomach pulled tight;  
as the city grew smaller  
I felt a rope inside me  
stretch to the point of breaking

then like a gift  
the line snapped  
and I was filled with  
a different deeper sadness:  
she was only the first  
of many I would have to leave

it was a warning that prepared me



I looked up  
as the darkness fell from blue to black -  
and saw a silhouette  
of the island's mountains  
cut out flat against the sky

and I was reminded of Odysseus  
who some believe  
had landed here  
when he was lost  
only to find his way back

back to Penelope  
and to his home

## **Sleeping Under a Boat**

*Age 21, Somewhere in Northern Italy, 1965*

Having nowhere to sleep  
we ended up underneath  
an overturned fisherman's boat  
on some beach in northern Italy

cold and tired we fit together  
in our clothes  
and although we kissed  
it was really our exhaustion  
that held us

it was two days later  
in Naples that the trouble started  
when we took our clothes off  
and something between us was gone

not lovers and no longer friends  
you were clinging to me  
and mocking me at the same time  
and I could not desert you

later when you followed me to Paris  
then ran off to London  
with the only set of keys to a borrowed apartment  
I wished we'd never met

and yet that first two days together  
hitchhiking through the south of France  
I still remember moment by moment:  
the one armed driver  
who passed cars while lighting a cigarette,  
the Germans who almost totaled their car,

the hot sand and blue of the Mediterranean at Cannes,  
the man who delighted in driving us slowly  
through Monaco at sunset

and then the morning  
after we slept on the beach  
when the fishermen were angry at first  
that we had used their boat for shelter  
but delighted when we showed them  
how to body surf  
so they fed us breakfast  
of espresso and sweet Italian pastries

I have savored this for 40 years  
and that was worth all of your turmoil

# **1ST MARRIAGE: AGE 22-32**

## **Drawing Calligraphy in the Sand**

*Age 22, Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina, 1967*

calligraphy based on the late works of Paul Klee

A drawing is simply a line going for a walk.

~ Paul Klee ~

I had learned not care  
about what others thought  
not even what I thought myself  
when the pen in my hand meandered  
across pieces of paper  
drawing line after line

after months a kind of alphabet  
or hieroglyphics  
had evolved --  
yet it was more drawing than writing  
and interlocking,  
each 'letter' part of the next

by that time  
the characters had become automatic  
like speaking in tongues  
like a language that my heart knew  
but my brain could not decipher

buying reams of blank paper  
I often stopped after only a stroke or two

while other sheets were more complex  
"What do these mean?"  
a friend asked  
"I don't know," I said

then on a weekend  
at the beach  
the shore empty late at night,  
I drew in the canvas of the sand

like a calligraphy brush  
that can draw thick or thin  
I straightened my fingers  
to plow wide grooves  
and then turned my palm sideways  
to carve sharp and narrow -  
after minutes I used my feet as well

the work went  
for ten yards  
etched around seashells  
outlining driftwood  
and across the side of a dune

when the tide came in  
it erased most of my script  
but left an edge  
above the high water mark

later on Sunday  
a breeze blew  
and my writing merged with  
the wind ripples in the sand

## **Action Painting**

*Age 22-24, Durham County, North Carolina, 1966-1968*

At a certain moment the canvas began to appear  
to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act.  
~ Harold Rosenberg ~

In painting, the primary agency of physical motion...is the line...as stroke or figure (in the sense of 'figure skating').  
In its passage on the canvas each such line can establish the actual movement of the artist's body as an esthetic  
statement.  
~ Hans Hofmann ~

After my mobiles  
and before my photography  
was Jackson Pollock

the painter  
with a picture in his mind  
standing still  
in front of his canvas  
was gone

instead was the moment  
the act of creation itself

and years later  
somewhat crude  
a bit rough  
that moment  
would still be there  
in its stark freshness

it was more than just an idea  
or a look  
it was the doorway  
to expression

I took this very personally  
as I wanted to work in a visual style  
that let me move freely  
but I knew my drawing skills were nil

yet I did understand composition  
arrangement, shapes and figure-ground  
so I decided to create work  
from the point of abstraction  
with paint flowing as the moment demanded

in 1967 in New York  
the Museum of Modern Art  
held a Pollock retrospective -  
I drove from Durham over a weekend  
then a month later I did it again

like a worshiper in a temple  
I roamed the rooms  
surrounded by his large paintings  
that swallowed viewers  
in their forest and tangle  
of lines

and everywhere was the sense of movement  
of the moment that paint hit the canvas  
everywhere that sense of now

later, as a photographer,  
none of this was lost -  
with candid work  
I was like a dancer  
always looking for the angle  
or moving with the subject  
and the moment that I clicked the shutter  
was the moment captured

## Art Of The Ordinary

*Age 22, Durham County, North Carolina, 1967*

(I arrived at this idea at age 22, but the poem is written from my perspective at age 66.)

The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.

~ Marcel Proust ~

Paint what you really see, not what you think you ought to see; not the object isolated as in a test tube, but the object enveloped in sunlight and atmosphere, with the blue dome of Heaven reflected in the shadows.

~ Claude Monet ~

What I see is ordinary

my wife two rooms away  
swishing a string near the cat  
so it jumps in the air  
as the light  
from the glass door behind  
outlines them in silhouette

on the side of the road  
I see weeds in bloom  
I see the redness  
of broomsedge in mist  
rain on my windshield

when I drive over a bridge  
soft twilight fades  
from gold to blue  
white houses taking on  
the color of the light

I am tired of  
the exotic, the elite  
the hard to understand -  
art should be immediate



simple and direct

a heightened moment  
snatched from  
the play of light  
the play of movement  
the play of work

nothing unusual  
except to show  
how extraordinary  
it is to live from day to day

## Discovering Photography

*Age 24, Durham County & Apex, North Carolina, 1968*

You don't choose your art, your art chooses you.

~ Unknown Graffiti Artist ~

He has found his style, when he cannot do otherwise.

~ Paul Klee ~

The sensation was hard to explain:

lets say it was like memories  
that I threw into a closet  
until it was stuffed, overflowing  
and when I believed what I had been told  
- that I was not visual -  
I pushed the door shut,  
squeezing scenes I had seen  
all my life:  
from the car's rear window at age 5  
the snow on the mountain  
the civil rights marches  
the smiles of my friends  
the nakedness of girlfriends -  
I had to push the closet door hard  
to get it to close

years later when I picked up a camera  
I was only going to take a few abstract photos  
just for fun  
instead the closet door popped open  
and a thousand memories feel at my feet

then a few months later  
in a darkroom I saw my memories  
or whatever they were -  
maybe dreams I had made real

maybe quiet moments I wanted to freeze -  
become black and white in the developer,  
while the pictures -  
like a pieces of paper  
in the pond where I grew up -  
floated gently in the tray

that first night after printing  
I floated in my bed -  
the scenes emerging  
like ghosts from a forest

and then there were  
those architectural pictures  
a few years later,  
my first foray into color:  
the abandoned Holly Springs high school  
with peeling paint  
doors ajar  
sun splintering through a rounded window  
echoes of students running in the hall

in the ground glass of an old  
Rollei twin lens reflex  
I saw my past  
about lost time, lost love  
lost desires  
at boarding school

later a painter told me  
she had come to my photo exhibit  
but had to leave -  
the sadness of those  
empty hallways  
moving her to tears

## **Happily Ever After**

*Age 24, Durham County, North Carolina, 1968*

Every composer is allowed  
his romantic moment  
and this is mine

at the age of 24  
like a prince in a fairy tale  
I had overcome all odds  
and won the princess

one Saturday morning  
after making love  
I lay in bed and felt  
my wife's body wrapped around me  
as I heard hard rain  
hitting the roof  
of our small cabin  
in the Durham woods

the downpour  
was comforting  
like a symbol for my life -  
I had weathered the storm

it was as though I had been thrown overboard  
and landed in a strange place  
that felt more like home than home

I had left my warring family,  
established myself  
in a new southern state,  
found an audience for my stories  
so hated in the north,  
graduated from college

with an honors in writing,  
and embarked on photography  
to complement my written work -  
an art form I had only discovered  
after years of searching

and not only that  
I had my first job that paid the bills

and of course,  
no story would be complete  
without the damaged princess  
whom I rescued and saved

I had married a woman  
whose beauty made people stop  
when she entered the room  
but whose shyness  
and deep hurt  
of things she could never speak of  
meant that as a prince  
I would have to bring her back to life

it was a fairy tale ending  
and being young,  
I did believe in such things

but like all such stories  
there were hidden monsters  
lurking in the woods

and this fabled ending  
was just the beginning

## Love's Loneliness

Age 24, Durham County, North Carolina, 1969

I did not expect this  
to love so deeply  
to be so alone

she wants to know where I've been  
and I've come from my nine hour job  
as a conscientious objector\*  
taking care of babies with diarrhea  
then mopping the floors after closing  
a job I must do for another year  
"I'm worried that you don't love me," she asks  
as I fall into our couch

"Tell me what's wrong?" she wants to know  
"I'm tired," I say, "And I have another cold I got from the kids."  
"No, it's more than that, you just won't tell me.  
Is it someone else? I just need to know."  
"There is no one."  
"But do you really love me?"  
"Yes, I really love you."  
"I mean really?"  
"Yes."  
"I mean really, really?"  
"Yes"  
"Really and truly?"  
"Yes, I really and truly love you"  
and I change the subject  
I get her to talk about herself  
problems with teachers  
problems with her boss at her part time job  
problems with other students at college  
problems with her family  
problems with her father

then we go to bed  
we make love  
afterward she cries into her pillow  
and I hold her

six hours later  
I wake and it starts again

\*In 1967 I could have gotten an automatic deferment from the draft by going to graduate school. I decided, instead, to face my draft board directly and apply for conscientious objector status. I was told that "hell would freeze over before it was granted" but when I made a personal appearance supported by letters from ten ministers, that I knew from the civil rights movement, my status was granted.

## Sighting Infinity

*Age 25, Alhambra Palace, Granada, Spain, 1969*

Hard and soft are so close, that it would be hard to distinguish  
liquid and solid, marble and water. Which one is running?...  
They are like the lover who in vain tries to hide his tears from his beloved...  
~ Ibn Zamrak, Islamic poet ~  
(from a poem about The Court of the Lions,  
carved on the Fountain of Lions basin at the Alhambra)

In/out  
above/below  
here/beyond  
liquid/solid  
marble/water

the Alhambra carved out space  
from a mountain top  
and like a sculpture retained  
a sense of shaping the sky

the normal boundaries  
of finite and infinite merged  
so one led  
to another and back again  
saying the same thing  
over and over  
each ceiling  
each courtyard  
each garden  
each iron gate  
each set of tiles  
with a different sensation  
but the same feel  
close up  
far away  
hallways that reached to the vanishing point



it was almost as though you could  
touch the air

## **Skinny Dipping At Love Valley**

*Age 26, Love Valley, North Carolina, 1970*

The local mountain men stood  
stiff as trees  
nakedness filling their eyes -  
from across the lake they zoomed in  
on young women shedding their clothes  
their hard breasts breaking the water  
while young men dove and cannon balled  
around them

it was the 60's,  
well really 1970  
and I had missed Woodstock -  
my wife said it would be too crowded

so second best  
was Love Valley  
founded by a man  
who built a town based on Hollywood westerns  
with a saloon, hitching post and general store  
who believed in love  
and opened his gates to a hundred thousand people  
that settled on his hills  
and listened

three days of music ended with  
the yet to be known Allman Brothers  
who played for hours until  
hippies started throwing mud

angry the Brothers left the stage  
but came back after twenty minutes of  
pleading applause -

now warmed up  
their guitars spread from the valley floor  
until the sun set

that night I drove the sharp mountain roads  
but was stopped by police  
who checked everyone leaving;  
finding nothing, we drove on

and then I knew  
I had had the full 60's experience

## Words from On High

Age 26, Apex, North Carolina, 1970

What that man creates by means of reason will pale before the art of inspired beings.  
~ Plato ~

When I'm painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It's only after a get acquainted period that I see what I've been about. I've no fears about making changes for the painting has a life of its own.  
~ Jackson Pollock ~

It was what an artist hopes for  
a direct line  
like a voice speaking to me  
and I rushed to my typewriter  
to transcribe it

word after word  
I was hearing the story for the first time

it began:

**SISTER:**

**He remained in the shrouded room.**

**Rags and dirty plates lay like shells across his bedside table.**

**From time to time we rolled him over and washed his bed pan out.**

**The blind covered window webbed the room in silhouettes.**

**He took a long time to die.\***

I typed as fast as I could  
hoping to keep up with the dictation  
in my head

and wondered how it would end

I have not had such a complete  
transmission since  
but often my poems start with a line

that comes to me

then having broken the ice  
bits of phrases often follow

now forty years later  
I see my work  
my inspiration and my muse  
a bit differently  
at one end of the spectrum is dictation  
and at the other  
the critical craft of writing

words often arrive like a voice  
but I am not afraid to change them  
after they appear on the screen  
or cross out a sentence  
or rethink an idea

I aim for  
a gentle consciousness  
one that has more to do with concentration  
than a clear sense of direction  
one that is about a give and take  
of listening and shaping -  
because often when I write  
I may not know where a poem or an essay is going  
so in a sense I both follow and lead

**\*See the Epilogue for the full story that I heard.**

## **The Silver Star**

*Age 6-18, Eastern Seaboard of the USA, 1950-1962  
& Age 25-28, Apex, North Carolina, 1970-1972*

The question of the purpose of human life has been raised countless times;  
it has never received a satisfactory answer and perhaps does not admit of one.  
~ Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and It's Discontents" ~

When I was six  
my father put me and my older brother  
on a train at New York --  
a train that went up and down  
the east coast  
and was known as the Silver Star

he gave the porter five dollars  
to keep an eye on us  
and sent us on our way  
to Florida where my mother lived

with no adult supervision  
we ran down the isles  
from the lounge car at the end  
to the dining car in the middle

when we stopped to catch our breath  
I looked out the windows  
which was like a movie  
where I saw glimpses of stories  
edges of people lives  
as we sped through backyards  
of laundry and fences

ever since that trip  
trains have held a magic  
and the sound of their whistle

can start me dreaming

nine months later  
my mother drove north  
from Florida by car;  
it took five days  
which let me see  
in slow motion  
what had passed by so quickly by train:  
plowed fields  
tobacco barns  
farm wives pulling  
buckets of water from a well  
rusting Model Ts  
chickens and dogs running  
with children

\* \* \* \* \*

later in my teens I took the Silver Star  
a dozen times  
to see my father in Florida

as the sun began to fade  
the homes of the mid-Atlantic  
began to appear  
and when the train crawled through a town  
or into a station  
I could see, even in the darkness,  
those backyards  
I had loved as a child

during the night I found myself  
reading short books of psychology  
*Civilization and Its Discontents*  
by Freud  
*The Undiscovered Self*  
by Jung

at dawn after crossing the Florida line  
I stood between the cars  
and inhaled the sudden  
humid air  
the scent of palm trees  
and Spanish moss hanging on the trees

\* \* \* \* \*

years later  
I rented an antebellum farm house  
in Apex, North Carolina  
about 30 miles  
from my graduate school

I had lived there two years  
when I saw a train rushing through  
on tracks that ran close to my house

as I waited at the railroad crossing  
the Silver Star flew by me  
"Well I'll be damned" I thought  
"my backyard  
has become part of the passengers' scenery."



## **Kicking Down the Door**

*Age 30, Durham, North Carolina, 1974  
Photography Workshop for Teenagers After School  
for teens at risk*

The heavy set black teen  
blocking the door  
announced,  
"My name is Concrete  
and I'm taking over this place."

he'd been watching  
too much gangsta TV

I walked up to him  
til I was eye to eye  
with a young man  
five inches taller  
and seventy pounds heavier  
"Get the hell out."

but then I stepped back  
and unexpectedly smiled  
"But if you want to learn photography,  
Come in and I'll show you."

Concrete was caught off balance -  
I walked away and turned to see him  
following me  
so I guided him into the darkroom

pushing the black curtain aside  
I brought him under the yellow lights  
as a teen blew up a negative -  
the bright reversed image  
glowing under the enlarger

"This is where we develop film  
and make the prints."

back outside I showed him the cameras,  
cheap copies of an early 35mm now made in Russia  
"Here take it." I handed him one  
along with a film cartridge -  
suddenly all thumbs he looked helpless

"You'll get the hang of it," I said  
as I deliberately showed off  
and effortlessly opened the back,  
snapped in the cartridge,  
pulled out some film  
and skillfully threaded it  
onto the take-up spool -  
Concrete watched me closely

"We don't push people here - you'll learn in your own good time."  
"But what do I take pictures of?"  
"What do you like?"  
"Karate."  
"Photograph karate."

after he left  
I was not sure  
I'd see that particular camera again  
but later that year  
when our workshop  
held a group exhibit  
his kick boxing shots  
were part of the show

## Tears

*Age 22-32, Durham/Apex, North Carolina, 1966-1976*

At first your tears  
were like a doorway  
that led me to you  
a way to comfort you  
something that drew us together

then your tears became an enclosure  
that surrounded us  
because when you did not want  
me to understand  
your tears stopped us  
and I held you in silence

toward the end  
your tears were a wall  
I wanted to reach you  
but your weeping blocked my way

finally they were like the weather  
they came so often and so full  
I thought of them like rain  
knowing that within an hour or a day  
they would be gone

so before we parted  
your tears meant nothing at all

## Persona

Age 23 -32, Durham/Apex, North Carolina, 1967-1976

No! I'm not like you. I don't feel like you.  
I'm Sister Alma, I'm just here to help you.  
I'm not Elisabet Vogler. You are Elisabet Vogler. (Spoken by Sister Alma)  
~ Ingmar Bergman, *Persona*~  
*Persona* was one of my ex-wife's favorite films

She was two people  
neither one complete

the first a needy child  
the second an angry teen

they were like characters in a movie script  
where the author didn't provide  
a background or a past -  
something was missing

after we divorced I realized  
she had been a chameleon  
who took on my personality  
creating the impression of harmony  
and intense devotion

later she shed that skin  
and the trouble started -  
as she turned her former likes into hates

for years I lived with two people:  
one who clung and feared that I would abandon her  
and as she said 'leave her in the gutter'  
another who hated that her last name was mine  
and ridiculed my work

six years before it ended,

I had two dreams about her

in the first

I was holding a child, my baby -  
I felt her arms and legs  
and that she was heavy  
under the layers of blankets,  
but her face was hidden -  
so I pulled back a cover to see her  
but instead there was another cover  
and then another and still another  
until finally, like a Stephen King tale,  
all the layers were pushed aside  
but underneath  
there was nothing, nothing at all

in my second dream,

I was driving with her up a mountain  
as the turns became sharper and narrower;  
at the peak  
I looked down and saw  
I had driven up a cone -  
so I could not go forward  
or turn around,  
and backing up would end  
with us falling over the side

for years I ignored these warnings

then slowly, carefully,  
I created distance between us  
until we separated  
and she learned to live on her own

then at last, I ended it

relieved but shattered

that our love  
had been an illusion

## **A Ghost**

*Age 32, Apex, North Carolina, 1977*  
after my divorce

I have been back to our home  
many times in my dreams

I drive down the long gravel road  
with red clay rising behind me  
to our front yard  
but no dogs run out to greet me  
which is strange

I walk in our door  
into the living room  
I can smell a large pot of lentils -  
a dish we learned to make in Spain  
with rosemary, onions and tomatoes -  
on the wood cooking stove  
that is putting out a soft heat

and the yellow muslin curtains  
you dyed and sewed  
blow in the drafts  
of this antebellum farm house

I am just about to throw my coat  
on my grandmother's velvet couch  
when I notice things  
are slightly ajar -  
I see new furniture and pictures  
have been added

in my home where I felt most comfortable  
I become afraid  
I am out of place

then I remember  
we have broken up  
and you are living with someone else

I hear a car  
and know I am an intruder  
I hide behind the wall paper  
as others walk past me

then I slip out the door  
and fly above the road  
as the house sinks into darkness  
and the one light upstairs -  
the one we always left on  
when we were away -  
throws a shaft through the windows  
onto the field below

I have this dream  
for many years  
and like the ghost  
that locals say haunted the house  
I have to keep returning  
looking for what we lost



# ***START OF 2ND MARRIAGE: AGE 33-39***

## **The Earth Moved**

*Age 33, Durham, North Carolina, 1977*

The night I met the love of my life,  
my second wife,  
the earth really did move  
as the Jack Tar Hotel in Durham  
fell into a pile of rubble

just before I went out  
I did two things I never do  
I looked in the mirror,  
and made a clown face  
like Harpo Marx  
while waving my open palms on each side  
and then saying out loud  
"I wonder who I will meet tonight"

an hour later I was at a party  
talking to a woman who was new in town,  
who crafted her own jewelry designs  
and in the next hour,  
I knew that I would marry her

when we were the last to leave the party  
I convinced her to come with me to Durham  
to see the dynamiting demolition

of the Jack Tar  
a local landmark  
that was to be taken down  
at six that morning

having time to spare  
we went to my house  
for some coffee  
but then fell asleep  
on the couch

in my dreams  
the moon was being pulled into a different orbit  
and I thought I felt the earth shake  
knowing my life would never be the same  
that something had ended  
that something was beginning

of course we overslept  
but having missed the destruction  
we circled the downtown;  
where the fifty-year-old skyscraper had stood  
was now blue sky,  
empty like a scar

we drove to a local truck stop  
where they served the best breakfast ;  
over scrambled eggs and coffee  
I told her about my vision  
of art, dreams and history  
of Jungian ideas  
and photographs I wanted to take

having studied art  
she understood the impulse  
and listened,  
a smile growing on her face

instead of the puzzled look  
I usually got

\* \* \* \* \*

about a year later  
somewhere in the Florida Keys  
we launched  
our \$29.95 inflatable boat  
into a hidden cove  
where clear water  
showed large boulders  
scattered on the bottom  
and the white coral floor  
pulled the blue of the sky  
into the sea

near sunset  
floating in this garden of rock  
we watched the sky and sea merge  
with a shade of turquoise  
I have never seen before or since --  
where in twilight  
we could not tell the sky from the water  
and we seemed to float into the air

I had at a last found a woman  
who had the right balance  
passionate and sensible  
creative and practical  
with the best laugh  
and who looked different  
from any other girlfriend  
but with a unique beauty  
that never faded

we would help each other  
both of us could be trusted

and we would be loyal and faithful  
but not tied down

I had finally washed ashore  
on the right island

## Lost in the Fog

*Age 34, Castle Hayne, North Carolina, 1978*

Sailing into the marshes  
in January on a warm clear day  
was a southerner's dream

my best friend, Tom, and I  
had just finished working  
on our boat  
that was calling to us  
to put it in the water

the old heavy catamaran  
we had bought for a song  
and modified  
sailed quite well in  
a good breeze

that afternoon we cut through  
the maze of marshes  
right up to Rich Inlet  
making it look easy

on the beach  
we broke out sandwiches  
and beers  
with no other boats  
taking advantage of the sun

we had been there many times before  
and did not worry about the gray pall  
that often comes in winter at the end of the day  
- it was nice to be outside in January

finally back in the boat

with a few too many  
under our belts  
we aimed for home

yet all at once, like a curtain,  
fog shrouded the marshes  
and the wind softened  
to a changed direction

undaunted Tom took the helm  
tacking more than ten times  
to bring it to the point  
where we guessed  
we had a clear passage home

but just when he had  
a straight shot  
he faltered  
and I lunged to grab the ropes

more by feel than sight  
I sailed as the fog surrounded us  
with the slight wind finally  
letting us go in one direction  
- if I was right  
this route would take us to the dock  
with no turns or detours

as the daylight faded  
a web of mist enclosed us in dampness  
and we glided in slow motion  
along the edges  
of gray-green marsh grass

just at sunset we did land  
and climbed ashore  
loaded the boat on the trailer

and went back to Tom's house  
to drink a few more beers  
never giving it another thought

and it was only years later  
that I wondered:  
what would have happened  
if we had been forced  
to spend the night  
in an open boat  
with nothing but flannel shirts?

## Southport Blues

Age 34, Southport, North Carolina, 1979  
the death of my mother

The motivation of the vindictive parent is to exact revenge against the other parent...  
~ Allan Schwartz, Ph.D. ~

When my mother died, I was angry  
no - I was furious  
and because I felt something  
I did not want to feel  
I was plunged into the same turmoil  
that had been the trademark of her life

hating shows of emotion  
she would not let me cry when she was dying;  
after her funeral I still could not  
as though my tears were now stuck in my throat

Australian with British grandparents  
and having lived in London  
she was known for her charming demeanor  
her distinct accent and her poise

always restless,  
she moved every couple of years  
just to move  
and when she wasn't moving  
she rearranged the furniture -  
growing up I hated this instability

I knew it was  
hidden anger with a polite face  
a rage underneath that leaked out  
in unexpected ways



for thirty years she had taken my father to court  
over the remains of an eight year marriage  
cases she never won  
- caught in the middle, I refused to take sides  
but it meant that my world was to be colored  
well into my thirties  
it meant that I could not stay at my father's house  
as a teenager, the only stable home I had known  
it meant that the sheriff showed up one morning  
and took possession of my father's car

by moving to North Carolina  
I got away from it all  
but then she followed me  
and bought a house in Southport  
promising not to be a bother

yet when she asked me  
to testify against my father  
and I refused  
she stopped talking to me  
for a year  
so her turmoil pursued me

after she died I had panic attacks  
I actually believed the sky was falling  
fortunately  
like catching an illness,  
I was able to fight it off,  
a year later I was back to normal  
although still wrestling with the guilt

slowly as time passed  
I was able to untangle  
some of the ropes  
she had tied me with

almost a religion with her  
she believed in telling the truth,  
in keeping promises  
which was the basis of her law suits -  
yet after she died  
I caught her in a lie  
and it was then that the wall  
she had built around me  
began to fade

decades later I was watching Dr. Phil  
"Never use your children  
like pawns in a marriage dispute,"  
he told a parent  
"They will hate you  
and with good reason."

finally,  
finally I was free  
free at last

## **Riding At the Bottom of the Lake**

*Age 36, Jordan Dam, North Carolina, 1980*

Jordan Dam was completed but the lake was not filled for several years due to a law suit

On my 15-year-old Honda Dream  
I revved the bike's engine and sped 10 miles  
down the bottom of this lake  
yet to be filled -  
along an overgrown paved road  
that lead to leveled towns  
and dug up graves

These fall afternoons  
I brushed aside flowering yellow bushes  
reaching across the highway  
and rode over tar  
broken by shallow streams

From my college study of years before  
I knew turns  
that lead to abandoned towns:  
Bear Creek, Seaforth and Farrington

With practice I learned to see  
where stores, mills and houses had stood -  
often an outline of trees  
that enclosed invisible buildings -  
or a driveway that ended at a ripped out foundation

It was like the joy of listening to a sad song  
I was remembering what I had lost:  
my mother who had died,  
and my home in the country  
taken for another lake project  
where I had lived with my first wife  
before our divorce

I had the valley to myself -  
startled quail flew ahead of the bike  
cool air with pollen hit my face  
and I imagined the lake with water  
covering me to the red clay hills  
boats skimming the surface

After an hour,  
I leaned my bike next to  
an old oak  
and walked the grounds  
of scattered bricks  
sensing the layout  
of a moved farm house  
of the well and barns;  
then I reclined on my seat  
imagining  
the rough truck engine,  
the clucking hens,  
the smell of tobacco curing

But when the sun's shadows  
began to climb the banks  
I knew I had stayed too long;  
with painted lines no longer  
there to guide me  
I fled following my dim headlights  
looking for the first new bridge  
that crossed the imagined lake

Gunning my small motorcycle like a dirt bike  
I climbed a steep hill up to a guard rail  
and followed along until I found a break  
onto newly paved highway

Below me the lake faded into blackness

and an hour later I was back  
back to my new house in the city  
back to my new girl friend -  
and I was home

## **Oatmeal Boxes and Rockets To Jupiter**

*Age 36, Museum of Life + Science, Durham, North Carolina, 1980*

The story goes like this:  
thousands of years ago  
in the desert  
a camel driver  
noticed a picture  
of his pack animal  
upside down in the dark  
at the back of his tent

like Newton's apple,  
this opened the world of light  
for an Arab scientist named Alhazen

in 1980 at the museum in Durham  
I taught children to see  
what Alhazen saw:  
oatmeal boxes turned into cameras  
with a tiny hole drilled with a needle,  
like the slit on the other side of the tent  
that had projected the camel's image

and the kids 'got it'  
in ways that an adult with  
a Nikon and a bunch of lenses  
never would

but also in the room where we worked,  
were sharp three-foot color photographs  
of Jupiter mounted on the wall -  
sent back, bit by bit,  
across millions of miles  
by a space probe

this part the kids did not get  
as these were some of the first  
digital photographs -  
the computer pixel replacing  
the silver grain of film

I cannot say exactly what I understood then  
but I knew it was important  
and that it would be at least a generation  
before I could hold a digital camera in my hands

yet seeing the very beginning of optics  
crafted by the hands of children  
next to the greatest  
photographic achievement  
was like a personal sign -  
I knew my own vision required more  
than film and darkrooms  
even though I had spent a decade with both

listening to the kids giggling  
as they exposed their film  
and watching them develop their negatives  
followed by prints,  
I sensed that I might just  
live long enough  
to get the tools I needed

to record my own insights  
about space and time and light

## Up a Lazy River

*Age 37, Eno River State Park, Durham, North Carolina, 1981*

Up a lazy river by the old mill stream...  
Throw away your troubles, dream a dream with me  
~ Louis Armstrong ~

Sundays were for stopping

Janet and I launched  
our K-mart inflatable  
just above West Point Mill  
then floated upstream -  
me gently rowing  
barely having to put oar to water  
as the river ran almost still

within minutes  
the traffic faded  
and the sounds of the forest  
full of birds  
opened to us  
in the high hills

taking our time to go a mile  
we crossed shallow slow rapids  
before the river spread wide  
to almost pond size

there cold water fell down rocks  
rounded and shaped  
by the flow of the stream,  
pooling in this local swimming spot  
where we often found friends  
lounging and diving



on the pebble covered bank  
we ate lunch  
then climbed to the  
sculpted stones  
hot with the sun  
and sat in the falls  
before swimming

hours later when  
long tree shadows  
fell across the water  
we headed back  
letting the boat  
find its way home

we drifted  
with the downstream current  
and the darkening hills  
as the sounds of traffic became louder

drifting  
to the edge of the old mill  
where the dam still held the water

and  
where our car was parked

## **The Orchids of John Hope Franklin**

*Age 38, Durham, North Carolina, 1982*

One feels the excitement of hearing an untold story.  
~ John Hope Franklin ~

When I showed up at his door  
I was just a young white guy  
with a camera on assignment

I had never met a man with such poise  
who offered me tea  
and then a tour of his orchid garden  
before we got down to business  
and I took his portrait  
for the Duke magazine

today I think about what I did not know then  
- how he had volunteered in World War II  
but was told he was the wrong color  
- how he, more than anyone, had researched  
and defined the history of the black struggle

and I think about what I had not told him  
how I had marched and sang and learned non-violence  
how I had been jailed  
in that same struggle

yet, oddly, those words were not needed between us  
it was as if we both understood  
and instead I walked through his greenhouse  
while his wife silently watered the plants  
while he told me about his passion  
and I smelled his orchids

## Meta-Tools

Age 39, Durham, North Carolina, 1983

Meta- (from the Greek...), is a prefix...  
meaning transcending, or going above and beyond.  
~ PC Magazine ~

For words are to thought what tools are to work;  
the product depends largely on the growth of the tools.  
~ Will Durant, "History of Civilization: Part 1" ~

You might find it odd  
to read a poem about computers:  
bits, bytes, and Boolean  
but I will do just that

all at once in '83  
cheap computers were everywhere  
and everywhere I went  
some kid had tweaked the thing  
so it repeated his name  
"Chris Jordan was here Chris Jordan was here Chris Jordan was here..."  
graffiti and  
the urge to declare existence  
now entering the electronic age

and I thought  
"Well, if a kid can do that..."  
so I set about figuring it out  
watching youngsters in the stores  
punch in text commands in BASIC  
as the early computers required

after a couple of weeks I typed in:

**10 print "Rick did it "**

**20 goto 10**

**run**

and like fireworks  
"Rick did it Rick did it Rick did it Rick did it"  
filled the screen  
side to side and top to bottom  
scrolling endlessly  
until the store pulled the plug

that night I could not sleep  
my dream world pixelated  
broken into computer bits -  
the digital world was calling

in spite of what my friends said -  
that computers were just a passing fad -  
I took a sharp right turn  
artistically  
and went from cameras and f/stops  
to RAM and ROM

I cannot tell you  
what I understood at the time  
but it was something about  
a digital common denominator  
of the future  
about power tools for the mind

## Coming Home

*Age 39, East Durham, North Carolina, 1983*

My step-mother had a stroke  
and my almost ninety year old father  
needed to be taken care of

while my step-brother dealt with my step-mother,  
I flew to Florida to get my Dad  
and take him back  
to Durham where I lived -  
with no idea of what I would do  
once he arrived

I was living in a cheap house  
everyone told me not to buy  
because it was in a changing  
black/white neighborhood  
(even the African-American bank  
would not give me a loan)

but I had not been concerned  
having been in the civil rights movement  
and after I bought the house  
I became good friends  
with a black woman, Lil, next door  
who ran a home for single men

after our flight  
sitting in the airport,  
I realized that Lil  
might have a vacant room  
and by chance she did

we decided to try it for a couple of days,

and then, when my Dad liked it,  
he stayed

looking out from my office  
I could see his window  
and be in his room in less than a minute

always close  
our relationship entered a new phase -  
I gained more respect for him  
as he adapted easily to his changed situation  
and made several close friends  
in the home

a year and a half later he died  
yet I had the satisfaction of knowing  
that I had done right by him  
and that the choices I had made  
allowed this time for us

it was a metaphor for my life:  
be responsible for the people you care about  
follow your instincts  
treat everyone with respect  
spend as little money as possible  
and things have a way of working out

# ***THE DEATH OF MY FATHER:***

## ***AGE 40 - 42***

### **16 HAIKU POEMS**

#### **The Death of My Father**

*Age 40, Sandwich/Boston, Massachusetts & Oxford, North Carolina, 1985*

my father's funeral-  
old friends call me  
by my childhood name

night snow  
behind his house,  
we walked on the pond  
ashes still wet

at Durgin-Park \*  
I eat the same  
halibut, cornbread  
as my fathers

at Oxford  
the orphanage playground  
we talked  
of having a child

\* Durgin-Park restaurant was founded in 1742 in Boston. My father, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers probably ate the same meal I ate on that trip back to the Northeast.

## **Down East, North Carolina**

*Age 41, Williston/Beaufort, North Carolina, 1985*

### **--A Weekend Away--**

in clear September light  
fish darting inside a wave  
crested, breaking

now I'm used to seeing  
wild horses across Taylor's Creek  
on Carrot Island

salty from our swim  
I fire charcoal with paper, wood  
you say I taste like smoke

power out  
so dark  
no one moves  
frogs scream

under the moon  
shrimp boats, yucca blooms -  
the surf's dark glittering edge

### **--Returning to Durham--**

the tiger kitten  
in Wendy's parking lot -  
dragging a burger

above the traffic jam



a hawk  
circling

back in the city  
I've lost track  
of the moon

## **Love's Labors**

*Age 42, Williston/Down East, North Carolina, 1985*

the darkness between us  
rising falling  
where do I end, you begin?

past the point of no return  
I am flying  
inside of you

after I yell, silence  
the soft call  
of owls

now apart  
sudden sleep  
thunder approaching

# ***MOVING TO NC COAST: AGE 43-53***

## **Serendipity East**

*Age 43, Williston, North Carolina, 1987*

One is too taken up with all that one sees and hears in Paris...  
and what I do here [in this remote area] will at least  
have the merit of being...the expression of what I, and only I, have felt.  
~ Claude Monet ~

Recovering from a cold  
and with a small inheritance from my mother  
I was sitting in bed  
calling different real estate agents  
to find a cheap -  
and I mean really cheap -  
house on the coast  
where we could stay  
during the warm weather

I was looking for a place  
in a rural and remote part  
of North Carolina  
because it reminded me  
of Cape Cod  
where I had grown up as a child

having traveled the area  
I knew that there were  
old houses in need of repair

after an hour I got one agent on the phone

who stopped trying to sell me  
something three times my price  
yet soon the conversation was going nowhere

I had a large map laid out on the bed,  
frustrated I randomly slapped my hand down  
so it fell on a body of water  
"Look don't you have some old fixer-upper on..."  
(I hesitated as I leaned over  
to read the name)  
"on Jarrett Bay...for \$10,000."

I thought the phone had gone dead  
but then  
"How did you know that? - yes, \$10,800 to be exact  
but it's been on the market for almost a year  
and no one wants it"

the next weekend we drove down to look  
three months later we closed the deal

at first we used it  
only as a summer place  
we stayed in July and August  
while I taught kids photography  
at the aquarium

\* \* \* \* \*

after seven years, in 1987,  
we made the full switch from Durham  
fixing up the house as needed

when we made the move  
it seemed like a crazy idea  
we were leaving a small city -  
where it was hard enough  
to get recognition as an artist

yet by the time we moved in the mid-80s  
I had worked with computers  
and sent files over the phone lines  
so I knew that a worldwide audience  
could be reached from anywhere

thirty years later  
this is where we live  
and it is from here  
that I have written my books  
and established  
an international presence

## Poetry in Motion

*Age 43-51, Williston, North Carolina, 1987-1995*

about photographer Eadweard Muybridge and his study of "Human Locomotion"

"One thing was very clear from Muybridge's pictures:  
No painter had ever gotten the position of a horse's legs correctly.  
In fact, many contemporary painters disputed his findings...  
as it meant that their paintings were all incorrect."  
~ equineink.wordpress.com ~

It was simple  
take photographs of a man walking  
of a woman holding a scarf  
coming down the stairs  
to see how the human body  
actually moved

in a famous bet  
Muybridge had already proved  
that the eye had been fooled  
for centuries  
as all four horses hooves  
did leave the ground  
at one point during a gallop

then like a strong microscope  
he turned high speed photography  
on the ordinary,  
taking sequences of motion:  
a woman  
with a broom in hand  
with a bucket  
a man  
with a baseball bat  
with a hammer and anvil  
nude people  
clothed people

for the first time we could see  
reality frozen at 1/1000 of a second  
and go beyond what the naked eye  
could perceive

fascinated  
I looked at his tens of thousands  
of shots  
thinking of the body shapes  
like abstract imagery -  
not realizing that  
I had been pulled back  
into figurative art  
as I played with his public domain work  
using early computer imaging

only years later with a digital camera  
did I reap the benefits;  
because of his study  
I now understood human movement:

in candid situations I could take  
a picture over 8 seconds  
that recorded continuous movement  
not broken into sharp frames  
but one photo  
blurred with the passage of time

an impression of the moment  
the simple continuity  
of everyday  
comings and goings

## The Beach Hut

Age 43 -54, Salter Path, North Carolina, 1987-1998

komponierhauschen: German word for a composer's hut

Authors have called it a writer's hut  
musicians a composer's hut

I called it  
my trailer at the beach;  
I paid \$800 for it plus  
\$100 a month lot rent  
to be close to the ocean  
and alone with my writing

over thirty years old  
with thin but real wood veneer  
the trailer measured 8'X30'  
and was almost small enough  
that I could touch all  
four walls and the ceiling  
when standing in the middle of a room;  
I found myself walking sideways  
after a day  
through the narrow hall

just a minute from the beach  
the ocean's sound was often amplified:  
sometimes just the continuous slap  
of one long wave hitting the shore,  
other times loud with white caps,  
yet often so still  
I could hear gulls  
fighting for a fish

by 1987 I had become comfortable with  
word processing  
and wanted to try my hand at

working without interruption  
no door bells, no phones ringing

at my writer's hut  
I developed a working pattern:  
I walked around the trailer park  
down to the sound on the far side  
then up to the beach  
letting ideas flow

back at the trailer  
I unloaded them  
randomly into software

concentration when undisturbed  
takes on a life of its own -  
between the blank page  
and the finished work  
is note taking:

the inspired idea  
that often appears ridiculous,  
random thoughts  
flying off into unrelated tangents,  
all can lead to a logical outcome  
a process that does not appear logical at all

it's like a cat who looks aside  
and seems to be distracted  
but never lets the mouse out of its reach

like children running cars over  
imaginary hills and traffic  
who forget for a minute, run away  
and then come back more involved than before

with word processing



at last

I had the tool I had been looking for  
it let me shape, carve and mold words like paint  
it let me play with my thoughts  
like a child in the sand

# ***PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER:***

## ***AGE 54-66***

### **Real Time**

*Age 54, Morehead City, North Carolina, 1998*  
on my early digital camera crude pixels changed back and forth  
as the sky faded and as I framed the scene for my next shot on the LCD screen

I often think the night is more alive and more richly coloured than the day.  
~ Vincent van Gogh ~

On the edge of darkness  
I have seen the twilight sky  
do it's digital dance  
in real time -  
pixels pulsing from  
cerulean blue to black  
on my LCD screen -  
van Gogh's deepest colors  
outside his cafe in the evening  
or his starry starry night

## Painting With Light

*Age 56, Morehead City/Beaufort/Down East, North Carolina, 2000*  
experimenting with slow shutter speed digital photography

Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.  
~ Albert Einstein ~

in 2000 I crossed an invisible threshold  
one that other photographers could have crossed  
but had not

deliberately, I bought a digital camera  
that would expose for seconds  
and not fractions

I had guessed that there was a world  
unseen and that the new technology  
with its instant feedback  
could give me the tool I needed

later I would understand  
that my life had been leading to this point:

a notebook about Einstein and space-time  
written at age thirteen  
and my decade long detour into computers  
plus my study of Muybridge's figures in motion  
meant that I was up to speed  
with the new photographic medium  
still in its infancy

not understanding the dimensions  
of this world at first  
it took a while to get my bearings

I did it step by step:

first mounting a tripod  
on the large hump inside my van  
next to the dash  
so that my camera peered  
through the windshield  
into the dark vanishing point  
of the highway

for 8 seconds  
points of light stretched across time  
until the shutter closed -  
now strung with bright yellow dashes  
from blinking warning lights,  
now streaked blood red, top to bottom,  
with brake and stop lights  
as I slowed into stalled traffic

prowling the highways  
I cruised the dark back streets and brightly lit bridges  
and coasted through the city's main drag,  
all the while keeping my eye peeled  
for flashing lights  
neon and areas of glass  
shiny metal that added reflections

I did this  
on clear nights or  
when a low cloud cover lit the sky  
I did this in hard rain, drizzle and mist -  
the wetness acting like a mirror and a lens

after months  
I pulled the camera off the tripod  
and shot handheld -  
the wavy lines more interesting  
than the straightness

imposed by the tripod

soon I parked  
and panned in rhythm  
to cars creeping through downtown  
or tourists ambling along the waterfront

then against the darkness  
I took 8 second shots of my wife  
from the passenger side  
as she drove her car  
lights streaming behind her  
and later musicians on stages  
their movement painted  
against the blank canvas  
of the night

and somewhere along the way  
I began to 'get it'

what I was doing was expressive  
- as I had hoped -  
but more than that  
these shots were glimpses  
of movement through time

where the passing moment  
was now smeared across the frame

## **The Birth of Venus**

*Age 57, Atlantic Beach, North Carolina, 2001*

That night  
you came out of the sea -  
no longer wounded  
you danced on the picnic table  
in front of Ziggy's beach front bar  
your wet white blouse  
clinging to your small body -  
hopping up and down  
you sang,  
"I'm tough; I'm tough."

I had heard  
about your accident  
the rollover,  
the ambulance -  
and then your absence  
from the coffee shop -  
our conversations unspoken

by chance  
I was in bare feet,  
feeling the summer sand,  
looking out at the white waves breaking  
when you and your friends  
came from the darkness  
into the soft light of the boardwalk

we looked at each other -  
your clothes glistening with water  
your hair damp like a newborns -  
and then you danced

in this unlikely moment  
I had been allowed  
to see your rebirth -  
and like Venus from the foam,  
you took my breath away

## Forgetting

*Age 61, 2005*

At the age of 18  
my girl friend had dumped me -  
but only six weeks earlier  
in our long distance relationship  
we had planned to be together  
for the summer

she could never tell me why  
except that she still liked me  
but needed to be alone

the weekend she told me  
I took her to some of my favorite places  
hoping to remind her how well we got along;  
even sitting on the grass divider  
of the Mid-Cape Highway at midnight  
watching the cars crest a hill  
(their lights in the full darkness  
breaking over the top  
like waves breaking over a sandbar )  
did not change her mind

the next day after she left  
I woke up shaking

yet at the end of the summer  
she called in tears  
"What was I thinking?" she asked  
but it was too late  
our moment had passed

decades later I was on the phone with her



as she had kept calling me  
wanting to stay in touch  
finally I asked what she had never explained  
"Why did you dump me?"

there was silence on the phone  
"I dumped you?" she said  
"I thought you dumped me."

"No it was you  
quite definitely,  
I spent a weekend trying to change your mind  
but you would not budge and  
then you left and went to Boston"

"Oh," she murmured  
"I did not remember that"

\* \* \* \* \*

my mother did not know the reason  
nor my wife  
nor I  
nor even my brother  
who hit me over and over  
as I stood there

he grabbed my t-shirt  
pulling it til it ripped  
"You're an animal," he said

but I did not hit back -  
because of my training in non-violence  
and because I wanted my mother  
to recognize the depth  
of his illness

his anger played out

I left  
waking up the next day  
to bruises and stiffness  
and after that  
any pretense  
of being able to get along with him  
was gone

yet my mother  
as she often did  
never pressed him for an answer  
and simply let the matter drop  
I was forced to follow  
her lead

a decade later  
after my mother had died  
we were talking on the phone  
about some lingering estate matters;  
I asked my brother why he had hit me  
and never apologized

there was an abrupt silence  
"I don't remember hitting you," he said

"Ma was there, my wife was there  
and no one understood the reason."

"I'm not saying you're wrong  
I just don't remember it."

and I never spoke to him again

## **Black and White**

*Age 63, Craven Community College, Havelock, North Carolina, 2007*  
teaching English expository writing

I ask the black freshman I teach  
about discrimination

he does not understand

I am just about to tell him  
about the long marches  
about the time I spent in jail  
about a world with two water fountains  
and backdoor entrances  
and other things much worse...  
but I stop - in mid-sentence

he does not know, I think to myself  
yet as a teacher  
I want him to know about history  
but I stop -

he does not know

and this once  
I do not want him to know  
because maybe he can grow  
without the dark shadow

maybe he can keep his innocence

## Scared of Heights

*Age 64, Williston, North Carolina, 2008*

At Florida springs,  
floating in shallows  
I was suddenly above  
a fifty foot drop -  
I caught my breath  
even as I was holding my breath,  
hovering in fresh water  
clear as air  
over the darkness  
of a deep underwater cave

years later I would dream  
of hanging above a river  
at the tip of a crane  
when my life choices had  
put me out on a limb

like a roughneck steeplejack  
walking the bare girders  
of a high-rise under construction  
I had a skeleton vision:  
that digital photography could be like painting:  
personal, subjective, expressive

yet my work had been met with ridicule  
my essays dismissed as odd  
and my vision seen as too heady

I had risked everything  
to piece together the two elements  
of my divorced family  
my father a painter

my mother a photographer

if I could merge them,  
I could be whole

now in my dream  
at the top of a suspension bridge  
I was in the wind  
at the end of a crane's arm  
with only slippery painted metal  
to hold on to

yet there was a stillness  
a simple beauty  
as the threads of fate  
were in control

always scared of heights  
instead I felt a sudden freedom

que sera sera

## Seeing the Light

*Age 63-65, Williston, North Carolina, 2008-2010*

A photograph is made by recording an object in space (via the lens)  
over time (via the shutter speed)...a recording of space/time.  
~ Rick Doble, "Experimental Digital Photography" ~

at the age of seven  
I wrote a book  
about going to the moon

I ruled the pages,  
wrote the text  
drew a picture or two  
and bound it  
between two pieces of cardboard  
and then with my mother's help  
stitched along the fold

I still have this in my library

about sixty years later  
following a hunch  
I was on the phone  
to the photo editor of Lark Books  
hoping she might be interested  
in some of my skills  
having already written two books  
on digital photography

"Well what book would you like to write?"  
she asked  
it was the question I had never dared hope for  
the culmination of all my efforts -  
a book on the new capabilities

of digital photography  
merged with an artistic vision

not only that  
I could use my writing skills  
my teaching skills  
my how-to skills  
my understanding of the tradition of western art  
all rolled together  
into one book  
that would lay out  
a new world of imagery

but I also knew that the volume I envisioned  
would probably not be the one published  
- that rarely happens -  
yet anything close would be a gift

a year and a half later  
I held it in my hands  
- you'd have to be a book lover  
to understand -  
like holding a new baby  
the book was finished  
and was even better than I had imagined

there are times when the threads  
of one's life long efforts  
do come together  
to weave a fabric  
you had in mind

## Operation

*Age 65, Carteret Hospital, Morehead City, North Carolina, 2010*

this poem came to me right after surgery for a full hip replacement  
and was the one that began this autobiographical series of poems  
see the introduction for more about this

You won't remember the recovery room  
they never do  
the nurse tells me  
you think you will but you won't

ceiling tiles  
square white lights  
swirling playing cards  
searching for a hat  
shuffle above me  
as I lie flat  
and roll into the nurse's care

it's like a dream, I say  
I had a dream, she says  
I know about dreams, I kept a dream journal, there is no logic, I say  
I'm falling, what does it mean, she says  
you feel you're losing control, I say  
I'm not flying, I'm falling, she says  
we're all in recovery, I say

then I crawl into a warm place  
above the bed and below the ceiling  
where the tiled lights stop moving  
and I hover



## Rehab

Age 65, Sealevel, North Carolina, 2010  
*Snug Harbor Retirement and Post Operative Recovery Facility*  
after hip replacement surgery

Not far from Limbo and the River Styx  
my feet are propped  
in my motorized lounge chair

I am a shadow of myself

"You are young," my doctor tells me,  
"only 66  
- the bone will grow  
and wrap itself  
around the spike of metal  
pounded and glued into your leg -  
it will feel natural in a few months."

Cradled in my wheelchair  
I test the hallways -  
dark labyrinths  
where the elderly roll by  
in slow motion

We are letting nature take its course

The faint legato Muzak of  
*Somewhere Over the Rainbow*  
follows us

We are all waiting

Like ghosts or angels, dozens of women  
appear and disappear -  
temperature, pills, shots, blood pressure, food -

many forget to wear name tags  
so I learn to know them by their clothing  
fish, birds, tigers, giraffes

On my large TV  
film noir shadows  
crawl across the criminals  
black and white cowboys ride off

I fall asleep when the flow of female voices  
outside my door quiets -  
in my dreams I see Achilles  
he walks on the river  
and beckons

I wake to the metal clang of carts  
and the dark mother of pearl sky  
that leaks into my room in the morning

Here darkness and light almost merge

And then I remember what  
Achilles told me,  
"You still have work to do."

With his assurance my bones relax  
- I will find my place back in the world outside -  
so for now I decide to cat nap

Until the muffled bell rings  
and I wheel my way to breakfast

## The Picture Not Taken

*Age 65, Snug Harbor, Sealevel, North Carolina, 2010*

A deep-sea fish has probably no means of apprehending  
the existence of water; it is too uniformly immersed in it...  
~ Sir Oliver Lodge, British scientist ~

what does a fish know about water?  
I doubt it understands being wet

living in time  
what do we know about the moment?

being immersed  
we swim because that is what we do

when I look up from my book  
I see the shadow of a colonial lamp  
projected flat against brick  
by the sudden afternoon sun  
breaking through the window

I want to reach for my camera  
and fix it out of time

instead  
over the next half hour  
I watch  
a slow motion collision:  
the wall and window shadows crash  
with the lengthening shadow of the lamp

as a photographer  
I know something about time  
and most of life is lived outside the lens

today I chose to save this drama  
in my fragile memory

and do not allow  
the split second it would take  
for it to lodge inside my camera

## Firebird

*Age 65, Snug Harbor, Sealevel, North Carolina, 2010*

Music is your own experience, your own thoughts, your wisdom.  
If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn.  
They teach you there's a boundary line to music.  
But, man, there's no boundary line to art.  
~ Charlie Parker ~

In Eastwood's movie  
Charlie Parker listened to  
*The Rite of Spring*

“How can he hear all those sounds?”  
he said before he got into a car  
and drove to Stravinsky's home

late and unannounced  
at Igor's gate  
a drunken Bird could not explain  
and Stravinsky walked away

we can only guess  
what kind of music  
they might have made

\* \* \* \* \*

when I read your poems  
memories overflow  
like a forgotten photo album  
or my father's  
Victorian paper weight  
that scattered light  
to paintings, books  
unpredictable  
when the sun hit it

like when  
a bunch of us kids  
measured and cut a board  
then snuck down in our boats at night  
to place it in the groove  
at the top of the old mill spillway -  
it fit perfectly  
and added twelve inches  
to Shawme pond  
where we swam everyday

a memory that had been lost  
until I read your poems

now I know  
you have not met me  
but unlike Bird  
I will, at least,  
tell you who I am  
and who knows...

## Getting Out The Word

*Age 66, Williston, North Carolina, 2010*

All endeavor calls for the ability to tramp the last mile,  
shape the last plan, endure the last hours toil.  
The fight to the finish spirit is the one... characteristic we must possess  
if we are to face the future as finishers.  
~ Henry David Thoreau ~

In 2009

I Googled myself -  
my work had been quoted six times  
at a contemporary art conference  
in Milan Italy

those essays about digital art  
and the modern art of the 20th Century,  
that no one had taken seriously,  
were getting a major play in Europe  
by professors who took it a step further

fast forward:  
nine months later  
my photos and writings  
were shown again in Milan  
at the following conference  
but this time  
next to Italian Futurist paintings -  
a movement that began exactly 100 years before -  
by artists who wanted to make visible  
imagery of motion in ways similar to mine

it was enough to take myself seriously  
(but hopefully not too seriously)

so as I end this series of poems  
I have so much more to do;

the work is not finished until  
I have gotten out the word  
and it will not be done  
unless I do

arriving at this point  
has been a life long effort -  
and I would love to rest at the age of 66 -  
yet no one knows how long they have

as Thoreau pointed out  
the world belongs to the finishers  
who, although exhausted,  
nevertheless go on



# ***EPILOGUE***

## **Back to the Future**

Countdown for blastoff... X minus five, four, three, two, X minus one... Fire!  
These are stories of the future; adventures in which you'll live in a million could-be years  
on a thousand may-be worlds.  
~ Opening narration, "X Minus One" ~  
a sci-fi radio program from 1955 -1958 that I listened to every week from age 11-14

Do I wish things had been different?  
do I wish I had not lived  
in the wake of turmoil  
that seemed to follow my life?

yes

my wish list:  
an older brother not mentally ill  
a mother less vindictive  
a father not wounded  
a love with less tears, fewer shadows  
and of course  
recognition for my art  
so I didn't have to struggle to pay the bills

yet

I have written the book I was born to write  
explored a new art form I had a part in discovering  
married the love of my life

change one thing in your past  
and you may be changing

a lot of other things as well

I am reminded of the  
*X Minus One* radio story  
in which a time-traveling tourist  
goes back a hundred million years  
to a Jurassic Park kind of place  
and is given one instruction  
"Stay on the special walkway.  
Don't touch anything.  
Just look."

enthralled by the prehistoric plants  
he walks along until -  
without thinking -  
he grabs a leaf  
puts it in his pocket  
and then forgets about it

coming back to his own time, however,  
he gets confused -  
some streets have different names  
a building is gone and instead  
a new skyscraper is on the horizon

when he drives home  
his ranch style house  
is turned at an angle

and his wife and children  
don't recognize him

## PS: Stories Not Told

Cross-section is the intersection of a 3-dimensional body with a plane.  
~ Wikipedia ~

Stain is the name of the game.  
~ Dr. Jacob Hanker, research micro-biologist, UNC-Chapel Hill ~  
I worked with Dr. Hanker in 1980; he stained blood cells  
to reveal aspects that could not be seen under normal microscopic conditions

I could have told  
a hundred more stories  
but in this case  
more would be less

those I have told  
are the highs and lows,  
the outline  
of my life & my emotions,  
any more would  
blur the clarity of  
what I have sketched

stories such as:

when  
my father remarried  
and his new wife turned out  
to be an alcoholic  
who hit his hand with the sharp point  
of a high heeled shoe  
sending him to the emergency room

or when  
I bought old Dodge Darts  
that I learned to fix and cannibalize  
so I could afford to go to graduate school -

which spawned my other career as a frugal guru  
leading to 3 books plus  
national TV and radio interviews

or when  
my careless first wife  
left candles burning  
where they could easily catch fire  
so I woke up choking with smoke

or when a close friend  
committed suicide  
and my other close friend  
became an alcoholic

or when  
I exposed myself to a wide range of art:

-- from a Rubinstein Chopin concert  
to Jimi Hendrix playing the Star Spangled banner  
-- from a Flamenco concert in Spain  
with the Gypsies in third balcony seats  
to a night of rave at Ziggy's By The Sea in NC

and I've walked inside  
the curved Gaudi buildings in Barcelona  
- where there are no right angles -  
and through Coral Castle in Florida  
where a Latvian man cut and moved  
ton slabs of coral by himself

and I've seen a retrospective of Calder's mobiles  
floating in the Guggenheim museum  
as though Frank Lloyd Wright's space  
was built to show them -  
along with James Hampton's  
naive masterpiece, *The Throne*,

made of light bulbs  
and aluminum foil  
peeled from gum wrappers

and quietly  
in rain-like mist  
I've wandered the Lake District  
thinking of Wordsworth,  
then later looked out to sea  
from a high room  
in Key West  
where Hemingway wrote  
*A Farewell To Arms*

yet I believe the stories  
that I did chose to detail  
are like staining organic matter  
to reveal the structure of my path

I think of them  
as two dimensional cross-sections  
of my three dimensional life  
as crystals  
or crystallizations  
that refract and also reflect  
my feelings at that point

## Quotes: Looking Back

An American Indian "observes the landmarks to his rear  
which makes it easy for him to return.  
A white man usually fails to do this and therefore often gets lost."  
Orientation: Some Reasons Why Indians Never Get Lost  
~ Fred Meagher, "Straight Arrow, Injun-uity Manual" ~  
published by Nabisco Shredded Wheat, 1951  
*I have owned this manual since I was eight years old*

Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.  
~ Soren Kierkegaard ~

It is a mistake to think that the past is dead. Nothing that has ever happened is quite without influence at this moment. The present is merely the past rolled up and concentrated in this second of time. You, too, are your past; often your face is your autobiography.  
~ Will Durant ~

The present moment is simply  
the leading edge of the past,  
a wave that is forever breaking.  
~ Rick Doble ~

## The Wind

*Age 8, Town Hill School, Lakeville, Connecticut, 1953*  
my first poem written in third grade

When the wind whistles  
through the trees  
with ease  
it blows about  
the little leaves

Sometimes the leaves  
do fall  
but in autumn  
most of all

## Why 2 Art Forms?

Painting is no problem. The problem is what to do when you're not painting.  
~ Jackson Pollock ~

1 + 1 = 3 This is not bad math.

With two art forms, writing and photography, I have two separate skills and also the interaction of the two (making a third) -- such as the way an idea in one will lead to work in the other. For example, I often think in pictures of a scene I am trying to describe in a poem or I think about how to verbalize a visual concept in photography.

My physical therapist, during rehab for my hip surgery, told me it was like exercising two different parts of my brain (like muscles for thought) rather than only strengthening one set of muscles. In physical therapy, working muscles in different ways leads to greater strength. In my case one art informs the other.

From the age of eight, I have been a writer. By the age of twelve, I had written pieces in a number of different forms: poetry, plays, essays, short stories, reporting, how-tos and also worked as a co-editor for the school magazine.

At the age of 20, I also began a quest to learn a visual art form. After years of searching I discovered photography which I picked up quickly because of my experience as a youngster with microscopes and telescopes.

For me these two art forms, writing and photography, compliment each other. I also believe that no matter how talented we are, each of us only has so many creative ideas -- that we can only go to the well so many times before running out of water. So it often works best to not force creativity but instead to let one art form lie fallow, so that the well can replenish itself.

# ***Hearing Dictation***

Poetry often comes to me in the form of hearing words in my mind. The following is what I heard the first time 'dictation' came into my head; it was like an independent voice that I was listening to. The words here are almost exactly what I transcribed at that moment. See my poem entitled "Words From On High" for an explanation.

## **A Poem in Two Voices, 1970**

SISTER:

He remained in the shrouded room. Rags and dirty plates lay like shells across his bedside table. From time to time we rolled him over and washed his bed pan out. The blind covered window webbed the room in silhouettes.

He took a long time to die.

Afternoons of summer rain came upon the house.

At times his arms would tense, the sheets would bunch between his fingers, and I would loosen his grip and straighten out the sheets. But he never answered.

Mother asked him. She motioned to the grave in the fields but he turned his face to the wall. Finally she kissed him and left.

We waited through the hot summer nights, the waves of his fever. As he shivered, we wrung out the old clothes and placed boiled ones on his forehead. He would watch us...Then we waited, playing cards...

MAN:

I've seen the tree outside my window and the monument beyond, in the fields by the pump house.

Now I watch the leaves swish their dress over the yellow blinds. The wall paper is tearing. Repeated and repeated across the room is a black design of a dark carriage rolling behind bushes and a rider on his horse, who blows a trumpet. Shadows hide and reveal the carriages, rider, bushes that never move but run over my room.

I had a dream...of a black sea lapping at my window. I saw it covering the glass. I wanted to feel the water but I could not move. Slowly darkness covered my bed like wild vines. It carried me out beyond the shadows of my window, the sunlight on the trees, and bore me to the end of the horizon where I became a wave of night.



The bed pan is full again. I wish they would empty it and bring me clean sheets...But I won't call them. They'll come. They think I should join the grave in the fields, but I'll not die for a while. Together we lie in this light...

It has rained for the last week. But a break in the clouds, a sudden muted light will fill the room. Then I can see...cracks in the floor...threads of dust...the path worn around the bed and bureau...the old copper in the grandfather clock...plaster breaking through the carriage and rider on the walls.

A flush of clouds again will smother the room. Then I'll mingle my fingers with the sheets and look to the flaps of shadows on the blind.

And for the last week pain has come in spurts. It presses on the small of my back. I turn to miss it but it comes again. I can feel the waves rush on.

SISTER:

The rain falls for the second week. How soon will he fill his grave..? We have carried him for months. He had left us for good. When he returned several months later, he said nothing.

He stayed in his old room. On the bureau he set out some stones he had gathered since he left.

Although he came to dinner, he talked to no one...One day in June when he did not down to eat, we found him feverish. A grayness had taken over his eyes. So still the form lay and let us undress him. Yet he did not die. For two months he lay in the heat, unmoving.

One night I could not rest. I walked down the hallways to free myself from sleeplessness.

As I came to his door, I saw it was open. I stood before it feeling moved to go in, but afraid.

Then slowly, as if being taken, I slipped between the opening and went in.

Threads of light filtered in from the living room. The outline of his back was to me. He was asleep; I stood observing his body. How his breathing hesitated through his empty frame.

*Now I hear the heavy ticking of the grandfather clock that fills the room with moments, spaces between each tick, shadows that appear and flutter away.*

*I look to the mirror above the bureau where a strange light not coming from the living room, but seeming to come from behind the glass, is pulling me toward it.*

*Two diamond points pierce my eyes. I turn. He sleeps with his eyes open. I see through the web of darkness.*

I ran out the room, banged against the bed...the hallway, out the front door. Then gathering breath, I walked outside. I lay under a tree to quiet the light that had entered and moved within me.

MAN:

My bed seemed comfortable tonight. It never has before. Something large and empty surrounds, hovers beyond my room. The clock ticks.

I think I went to sleep and dreamed the bed was a shell that grew around me. I awoke watching the filmy light change like clouds across the mirror.

A large form emerged in my room, stood silent for moments, walked to the mirror, then turned

toward me.

*Suddenly it leaves. Ticking fills the room. I can hear the beating of the drum...a closing and opening like bellows outside the room; the walls seem to move like flaps and the breathing comes close, spilling through the cracks, over-coming my heart, the room; I am taken across the light.*

SISTER:

Over the fields the sun rose. The monument cast its shadow; I saw it crawl though the grass. Light filled the leaves above in the tree that I lay against.

I felt something heavy passing. My stomach calmed. A seed had come to rest. I lay terrified between the tree roots, and I slept.

When I awoke I returned to the house. Mother said that he had died. Something was gone from her eyes and a grayness had come to fill it.

All day the family moved in pantomime. While his grave was dug...his body prepared...we dressed.

In the late afternoon, we carried his coffin, so light now, to lie next to the monument. Behind the coffin, mother led, covered in a black veil, her robes fluffing in the hot breeze.

We buried him.

We returned to the house.

We stayed in the living room as the sun went down. Mother looked out the window at the two graves beyond.

We waited as twilight filled the room.

No one got up to turn on the lights. A blanket of night covered the graves and filled the house.

We waited.

## Appendix

**Rick Doble's website**

[www.RickDoble.net](http://www.RickDoble.net)

**Rick Doble's experimental digital photography**

[www.RickDoble.net/paintingwithlight](http://www.RickDoble.net/paintingwithlight)

**Rick Doble's detailed autobiography**

[www.RickDoble.net/lifestory](http://www.RickDoble.net/lifestory)

**Rick Doble's essays about contemporary art**

[www.RickDoble.net/essaymenu.html](http://www.RickDoble.net/essaymenu.html)

**Rick Doble's frugal living site**

[www.Savvy-Discounts.com](http://www.Savvy-Discounts.com)

**Rick Doble's email address**

[rick\\_doble@yahoo.com](mailto:rick_doble@yahoo.com)

**Rick Doble's relationship site**

[www.abusivelove.com](http://www.abusivelove.com)