

Collected Poems

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Poems, with exceptions such as roasts, are written in elevated states of emotion. The emotion can be passion, excitement, idealism, irony, cynicism, hatred, resentment, depression, anxiety. Poems may be a replacement for action.

What follows is a collection of most of my most coherent poems over a time span of some 65 years. I have edited some of them to strengthen the words, improve the grammar, meter, and rhyme, and make the lines run evenly, without changing the meaning. Every poem is accompanied by an annotation or commentary to the background, motivation, and state of mind for the poem as best I can.

There is always a background to a poem. Annotation for any piece of creativity is useful even if some of the inspiration wells up from the unconscious of which the creator is unaware because the poet does know some of the background that no one else would know. Thus, for example, Robert Frost wrote *The Road not Taken* in part to satirize an indecisive friend.

Some of the poems were written for friends and family that most readers cannot know. I have included only those poems that I feel they have some generic merit despite the particular people described. Generic merit includes what gives me pleasure.

Enjoy!

Adele

March(?) 1956

*My name is Adele
And I'm a dumbbell
I can't read or spell
So throw me down a well.*

Commentary: This is a facsimile of the first poem I ever wrote, because the poem is long lost. Adele was a new student in the 6th grade class who manifested insane and aggressive behavior. I gave it to Charlie C (a bully) to give to Adele so that he might get beaten up. Adele got the poem, almost killed Charlie, who pled to Adele to spare his life because I wrote it. Adele came to me with fiery red eyes and death for me in her heart. She asked me if I wrote it. I looked at it, read it silently and slowly, didn't laugh or express any emotion, and then asked calmly, "Do you think I would ever write a thing like that?" After that Adele loved me in the sense she would do anything I asked. Lucky for me that our teacher didn't die.

This showed that I was a satirist and a wily, sneaky chicken from a very early age.

Throwing Stones

11 October 1964

*Don't repel those who throw stones
If you can teach them how not to fear
For that is the best of loans
That you might make people's lives more clear.*

Commentary: In 1963 I began keeping a journal, which I kept for about 8 years. My purpose was to improve my poor writing skills, and learn more about myself. The journal served as a diary, as well as place for essays, short stories, and poems.

This poem, almost certainly the second poem that I wrote not for a school assignment was done as an epitaph at the end of a story I wrote about an old couple who owned a large unfenced tract of land in the city center and welcomed kids despite occasional hostility and vandalism. It is also based on a personal experience of once throwing a stone at some old neighbors for no reason at all other than that they were old.

Terminal Assignment

18 March 1967

*Unwind the universe my friend
The teacher told the student
Here is a poem about its end
I hope that its resolvent*

*Fourteen lines it has you see
My beautiful student pet
And so I think you must agree
The poem is a sonnet*

*I'll give you several formulae
To help you understand it
But please do feel completely free
To add new rules to make it fit*

*But a poem must conform, you
know
To several elementary rules
Beyond them it can never grow
As has been taught in all the
schools*

*So here's a poem I do confess
Is somewhat out of norm
And I have made a thorough mess
Trying to make it conform*

*So to my students all I give
This too elusive poem
And hope that while I live
I'll find it under that dome*

*"But!" one student says to me
Your logic I defy
This poem does not fit you see
Despite what you may try*

*In the poem is unfurled
A veritable circus promenade
And it tells about the end of the
world
Where all our normal laws are
stayed*

*So it should not really be a
surprise
To find these laws suspended
Don't try to use your classical
rules
This poem shows how they have
ended.*

Commentary: I wrote this for my beautiful girlfriend, Debra (in less than an hour) to help her with her assignment to interpret or comment on Archibald MacLeish's poem, *The End of the World*, regarding the trivial human activities at the end of the world. The Professor in the course never gave grades higher than D. I felt superior. Thus the satire. Debra handed in this poem as an extra but the Professor refused to grade it, likely because he couldn't give it a D.

Climbing My Tree
16 December 1967

When I was small I planted a tree
At the edge of the front yard garden
I loved to climb, it was my plea
That tree must grow and harden

The first year it took root all right
And green leaves grew upon it
But brown they turned with Autumn's gaze
That spring no leaves grew on it

I thought it dead but left it there
A standing corpse stark naked
The next year came and once again
Good leaves and seeds grew on it

It grew with me that sturdy tree
And each year found it stronger

The branches thickened and threw down
shade
But to climb I must wait longer

Full manhood then I reached and left
For other far off cities
The tree was still a virgin since
No one had yet climbed on it

Two years and three I stayed away
The tree for me grew lonely
But I came back for visit short
My eyes looked treeward only

I grabbed my hand upon its branch
And pulled my body skyward
The eager tree supported me and
I finally did climb it.

Commentary: The poem has curious sexual overtones or undertones. You are free to figure them out. My mother and I planted the oak tree, it did begin to grow a year after apparently dying and did grow large, though I never climbed it.

Another poem started that night for a girl named Elena I dated all too briefly, even though spring was a long way off.

*The spring of the year is coming around
The sun is getting higher
Its brilliant light has wakened me
For you I'm still on fire.....*

Jesus's Second Chance
18 December 1967

Jesus

*"It is many long years since I've walked on the Earth
The place looks so bright, all around me is mirth
I'm surprised by this greatest profusion of wealth
All around me are happy, strong faces in health
In my days with riches along came bad vice
Here all are quite well off and all are quite nice
They listened, they listened, and now I'll rejoice
I lived not in vain for they all heard my voice"*

Cynic

*"Take credit only where credit is due
Progress has come, yes, but in spite of you
On riches and pleasures you cast one grand hex
Denied all good living and gave up your sex
You touched all the poor as they lay at your feet
They thought you were God, they gave you a treat
If all humans had been in like measure depraved
You'd have had every bit of the power you craved."*

*"What drove you to throw off your life I don't know.
But pain on Earth lasted long after that show
Years later when minds tried to sever your grip
The pope, your true son, made free use of his whip
So that those who were free from your great mental chains
Had to suffer their thoughts under terminal pains
So by miracle only your lies were unfurled
We've buried your chains and set free the world."*

Jesus

*"You cannot be saying the things that I hear
To miserable lives I tried to add cheer
We're all sons of man with rich souls to be freed
That's what I said in the Bible you read
I taught for there wasn't another to teach
For many's the man who is well within reach"*

*Of his soul and with just a bit of good aid
But I didn't play God for with them I prayed"*

*"Some rich men grew angry and took me by force
The judges, corrupt, hung me up on the cross
And I looked in great pain, what an end this would be
Oh, my God, Oh, my God, why forsakest thou me
Once I was dead they all misused my name
Theirs was the power and mine is the blame
It was those who opposed me who fettered the path
But Oh, I was dead and thus useless my wrath."*

*"So if you must blame me I will not stop you
I have so few years left of living to do
A gift from good God who said that I earned
A little more life, so to Earth I returned
Though errors I made as all good men do
My message I see has clearly come through
If only through others, I've still no regret
Its life that's important and that, don't forget"*

Commentary: This poem was inspired by the brightness of Christmas lights in the dark, last fall days of Boston. Though I disliked the focus on Christianity, the Christmas lights did serve the purpose of making the streets bright. It was also inspired by Dostoyevsky's story, ***The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor***, set within the novel, ***The Brothers Karamazov*** and written by the atheist, intellectual brother, Ivan. It is a story I particularly love and admire.

Poem snippet
14 July 1968

*By bread alone begins our life
Then love comes in
And with it, strife.*

To Bernice

First Part completed by 29 January 1970

Second Part completed by 2 March 1970

*I swore to put my heart to verse
To speak aloud about Bernice
I then renewed my ancient curse
Her love's reduced and mine's
increased*

*But now I'll flirt with fate and try
To stay her longer in my sight
She goes away I know not why
And I tried not to stop her flight*

*Oh, I could play a game and flirt
To get revenge, which would feel
sweet
But I'm not one the truth to skirt
I reached not for her fleeing feet*

*A wave of anger rushed through
me
It weighed on me a day or two
I burned me hot with jealousy
And then I had a feeling new*

*I want Bernice that's what I fain
The jealousy's a thing of hate
That slows your mind and adds
deep pain
I'll be direct, my heart I'll state*

*Oh woman with your divine form
So gentle soul made body soft
You're not unique, it's my tenth
storm
By fair sex caused at least that oft*

*But you've a power o'er my soul
That captures me at least today
To make you mine is now my goal
If after that you run away
I'll gather rosebuds while I may.*

.....

*So now a month has passed, my
rose.
I've let you see some bad in me
My love it like an ice jam flows
Heaps high with feelings blocked
unfree
But waters warm are melting me
My good will rush down to your
sea*

*There'll always be some chunks of
ice
Trapped in my flow and sinking
deep
What woman wants her man all
nice
A sluggish creek almost asleep*

*A mountain stream I am and you
Are the sea I enter roaring
I am part ice and yet it's true
That you want to do some melting*

*But you are not a passive sea
With waves and tides you greet
my flow*

*You grew more sweet by melting
me*

*But I have brought the salt you
know*

*From you it is my waters rise
You vaporize and float on high
And drop on me from stormy skies*

Then gorging down to you I fly

*I rip the land and rake up mud
As I go rushing down to you
You mother life when we mix
blood*

*New streams will bed in our mud
stew.*

Commentary: My wife, Bernice was seriously dating another man when I met her. Needless to say, I was jealous, particularly when she left for a weekend with her old beaux. Eventually, she fell in love with me. Later on, Bernice's sister set up that man with the woman he married.

I hesitated to include the poem showing my passion – a word and feeling whose origin is pain – but youthful passion is an important part of everyone's life. My later poems focus more on things like regrets about not having taken enough advantage of my youth, aging, and the fear of death, so this is a good and necessary counterweight to my gerontology.

The Last Christmas Party

10-19 Dec 1970

*From Archaeozoic I will trace
Life's course with poetic grace
It seems that well before the time of Noah
The Earth was stocked with protozoa
Say your brain was like a worm's
Who through the dirt just twists and squirms
Yet what else has caused such cerebral furrows
Than to comprehend their Pre-Cambrian burrows
It is a task far more than heroic
To trace life's advance in the Paleozoic
Moss, Lichen and other things floral
Appeared as did the world's first coral
Our knowledge is but inchoate
To amphibian from invertebrate
But we know the first that rose from the seas
Was the clumsy lungfish, Choanichthyes
Yet intriguing as all this seems
It tells no tales to give bad dreams
So children are most loquacious
From Triassic to Cretaceous
Because they love the dinosaurs colossal
And dream them livelier than a fossil
They the Earth did rule and defile
In this the Age of the Reptile
But a comet their destruction decreed
Is nothing sacred guaranteed
Then when the reptile grew stoic
The Earth entered the Cenozoic
Tired of its earthly fix
Took wing the archaeopteryx
And so became in one short word
What we refer to as a bird
The rat and whale, bat and camel
Evolved from one primary mammal
I'll tell of others though I'm liable
To slander and confute the Bible*

*A horse far too small to flip us
Was the foot-high Eohippus
With a thigh bone larger than a man
Was the beast of Baluchistan
And you can still make steaming broth
From remains of woolly mammoth
These animals were unlucky, I think
For all of them are now extinct
And with the retreat of the last Ice Age
For man the Earth had set its stage
So since things are ephemeral
Let's all enjoy and have a ball
And celebrate with appetite hearty
What may be our last Christmas party
(And celebrate with joy and mirth
What may be our last days on Earth.)*

Commentary: Written for the Geology Department Christmas Party. This has my typical satirical sense of irony. I had just finished teaching climatology, into which I inserted a section on paleoclimatology, a subject I fell in love with. This was some years before paleoclimatology became so big. I never did any research in the field, but recognized it was underplayed. I still suspect that the large dragonflies of the Carboniferous and large pterosaurs of the Mesozoic were enabled by a thicker atmosphere than we have at present.

Sweet Sixteen
December 1971

*Sweet sixteen and never been kissed
The Statesboro shiksies don't know what they've missed.
But now that you're going on seventeen
With the girls you'll soon no longer be green
And Mama in sneakers is running around
Tracking you down like a wary bloodhound
Because when you'll be the shiksies embracing
The whole Jewish neighborhood you'll be disgracing
Then Pop will find you an old Jewish maid
Who's trained in the arts - she's cooked, sewed and prayed.
So if you think now that Statesboro stinks
Just try moving your balls off the links.*

Commentary: Certainly one of my better poems, inspired by Bernice's brother's 16th birthday and by his mother's concern that he and all the children stay within the Jewish fold. Barry was a great golfer in high school. I don't know why he didn't try to turn professional. He actually trained me to get par on one hole. Then I quit golf forever.

My Bernice

18 August 1972

*Sousa only had a band
Moses but a Promised Land
Jason just some golden fleece
But only Stanley has Bernice.*

Commentary: At that time I got a flu that leveled me. My relatively new bride, Bernice nursed me back to health and in gratitude I wrote the first four lines. Years later after children I added some lines but they are not as good. Since they don't match up I don't include them here.

I call the first four lines my best poem.

Climates of the World

27 Nov - 03 Dec 1972: Final sonnet 19 Dec 1972

I

*Near the line and the ITCZ
There's always high humidity
When men come here to search for gold
They soon find they're encased in mold
And all possessions quickly rot
Because this climates' also hot
There's no lack of monotony
Where each day it rains just at three
Here days are hot and nights are warm
And insects round about you swarm
Injecting plagues to do you in
While taking chunks of tender skin
So though one can't decipher seasons
For leaving there's no lack of reasons.*

II

*As you leave the jungle's shade
The winds pick up and foster trade
The rain comes but it quickly ends
Cause usually the air descends
And warming adiabatically
Can dry you out immediately
One thirty in the shade is fun
But you'll be standing in the sun.
And though the day's a bit too hot
The night can freeze you on the spot
From day to night there's such a change
It will a healthy mind derange
Who could like this but a dummy
Stay long here and you're a mummy.
(On hundred thirty where its shady's
Hotter than it gets in Hades
At night when all has gotten darker
Then it feels great - with a parka)*

III

*Some say the climate is the best
In the subtropics in the west
Rare are days that don't reach fifty
And only in winter is the weather shifty
But no sooner does it cease to rain
Than a bright sun comes out once again
The summer temps are simply swell
So long as the ocean does upwell
Its nice like this along the coast
While just inland the natives roast
And inland from the coastal fog
Inversions trap manmade smog
And do the air most thickly cloak
Its time to leave or else we'll choke.*

IV

*We move now toward the rising sun
To one more clime that's so much fun
Where what you gain by breathing free
Is lost to high humidity
Here hurricanes are apt to stray
With homes and lives they like to play
And if you only catch their fringe
Tornadoes can go out on a binge
Were summer dry they'd call it torrid
But since its humid its more than horrid
But in the winter, spring and fall
The climate isn't bad at all
Yet not much longer will we encroach
On the land of the giant roach*

V

*Moving north it starts to cool
But not enough to make you drool
They call this climate temperate
But that's less fact than etiquette
Each day up here a new wind blows
From all the passing highs and lows*

*Yes the climate makes its name
Cause no two days are e'er the same
Now a heat wave, next a blizzard
Who could predict it but aa wizard
Yes every type we get its true
But never will the sky look blue
So no one would a moment grieve
If perchance he had to leave*

*VI
To the western edge of land we go
To where the ocean rules the show
Here upon the windward slopes
Sunny summers spur your hopes
A heat wave here is rare indeed
Its just the climate humans need
But windward slopes do have a danger
Rain to them is sure no stranger
So when autumnal clouds roll by
You hear one long colective sigh
The sun will hide six months or more
And winter's drizzle lies in store
So even though this climate's mild
Drip by drip you'll soon go wild.*

*VII
Further poleward round the globe
Boreal forests the land do robe
I think in all of God's creation
No clime has greater variation.
Far from winter's deep, deep freeze
Summer is a hundred degrees
It warms and cools so rapidly
That shock waves cross the mercury
That is above 40 below
Cause frozen mercury cannot flow
So special methods are used here
To measure temps one third the year
But even summer's hardly fun*

Since black flies keep you on the run.

VIII

*You really have to be a blunderer
To spend much time upon the tundra
Not a tree is to be found
Since only moss grows on the ground
Here mile is a word that's lost
Beneath all the permafrost
Only summer is less harsh
When melted earth becomes a marsh
The land then is a barrier
To all who choose to tarry here
This climate is the most inferior.
No wonder they keep it in Siberia
So just in case you hadn't hoid.
This is a great place to avoid.*

IX

*As we near the frigid pole.
We find the weather's always cold
Just take the negative of Haiti
And freeze your butt at minus 80
Half the year the sun goes round
Yet otherwise cannot be found
No sooner does it go below
Than large inversions start to grow
And dry the air by sublimation
Thus scant the precipitation
No wind we find the flags to flap
Atop the great polar ice cap
So amazingly it is the norm
To have a calm and not a storm*

X

*Now we see our trip is through
And we must end as poems do
And find a moral for the story
That would cap these words in glory*

*Like if we'd only learn the climates
We'd surely be much higher primates
While a study of geology
Barely reaches mediocrity
Yet next year if you want me to
I'll write some lies in praise of you
For there must be some use in rocks
Other than filling Christmas socks
Yes, the earth acts like a hardened cast
To record the climates of the past.*

Commentary: Written for the EAS Department Christmas party of 1972 with a last sonnet used to tease geologists. Modeled after Trewartha's climate classification scheme.

Twinkle Twinkle UFO

1973-74

*Twinkle Twinkle UFO
How you glitter, how you glow
Up above the sky so high
Just like Venus in the sky
Twinkle Twinkle UFO
How you fool the folks below.*

Commentary: This was my first published poem in the local newspaper of Piermont NY. Bill Donn submitted it if I remember correctly. A sighting of Venus near the horizon roused some folks into thinking they were witnessing a UFO and an imminent invasion of Earth. The invasion never materialized, which gave enough time for the paper to print the poem.

Wedding Day

June-Sept 1974 (?)

*Patty and Marty gave a big party
All for their wedding day
Said Marty to Patty, "I feel simply natty
I've been waiting 9 months for a lay."
Said Patty to Marty, "Don't be such a smarty
For I know how to hold you at bay."
Said Marty, "My lover, get under the cover.
We might even skip the foreplay"
Said Patty, "My honey, I always charge money.
And I know that you're too cheap to pay."*

Commentary: This poem ridicules friends at their wedding. How insensitive of me to ever show it to them. But it is a great poem capturing some of their flaws. Marty and Patty ultimately divorced and remarried, more happily. I always did think that they were poorly matched, at least in terms of love.

Downhill Racer

December 1975

*Downhill racer, Barry R.
You've reached the age of 20.
Decay is not complete so far
Ahead there'll still be plenty
The prime of life has passed you by
While you were in Statesboro;
And no matter what you try
The decline will soon be thorough.
The teen years is a time for fun
You've learned it now that it's too late
The best part of your life is done
So listen well to what's your fate
Your heart will fail, your mind decay
You'll be confined to rockers
Your strong sex urge will fade away
Even for girls with knockers
Nothing in the deal seems fair
The trick life played on you is dirty
Yet till today you've had one scare,
Now try to think of life at thirty!*

Commentary: Written for Bernice's brother, Barry's 20th birthday. It is a general commentary on aging. This pokes fun at the inevitable concern we have of leaving the teen years behind. Several of my Birthday poems deal with the issue of aging and decaying.

Sir William Donn Esq., On His Projected Retirement

Early May 1977

*I see no good students around to inspire
So I believe it is time to retire
Unless some memo should happen to mention
That staying here longer could beef up my pension
Now since I'm the reason we're here on this date
I'll tell you just how I became Bill the Great.*

*When I was young I'd watch the sky
An astronomer to be I'd try
But my orbit took a different path
When I found I lacked the brains in math
So I took up a science where no math was needed
And this is precisely just how I succeeded*

*But before I could see what my fate held in store
The Japs bombed Pearl Harbor and started the War
My spirits are fired but I can't fight abroad
For I have diarrhea I told the draft board
The board members told me I soon would feel keen
When I saw all the other guys at the latrine*

*My body is weak oh but strong is my knowledge
I then told them what I had studied in college
Its true, said the drafters, he's light as a feather
So maybe he's able to forecast the weather
And thus by the time the War has concluded
The only front I'd ever seen was occluded*

*Professoring was what I decided to do
Since each week it took just one day or two
In science my name reached a quite lofty perch
By pursuing the most esoteric research
And publishing papers that really took gall
(Here and there helped by my old friend, et al.)*

On leaving I see I have just two regrets

*I can't use my textbooks to settle my debts
And I'll lose the students I've used as slaves
To do my research on climate and waves
Perhaps I'll have time for my kids and my wife
Which will probably be the worst years of their life.*

Commentary: This poem was written just before the retirement party of my senior colleague, Bill Donn, with whom I collaborated on some research in atmospheric gravity waves. Bill was an influential member of the faculty and when I read this, some of the other department members feared for my professional life. But I liked Bill, who was a real scientist and a spirited man to boot. Bill loved the roast, which contained many elements of truth. His wife, Renee, an MD loved it even more and my wife Bernice wrote it up in calligraphy and presented it to them. It hung on their wall as a reminder of the virtue of humility. Some inspiration for the poem came from the bragging but self-deprecating introductions of Gilbert and Sullivan characters such as *When I was a Lad* in the *HMS Pinafore*.

I have written multiple other roasts. In one case, after reading out a roasting poem at a Meteorological Optics meeting, some people whom I had not included came up and to my surprise begged me to include them, proving that people crave bad attention much more than being ignored or overlooked.

Oh Blombergs, My Blombergs

December 5, 1977

*Oh Ronnie, my Ronnie, You leave us much too soon.
For once you're not all ripped apart, you clumsy big baboon
And you are taking Mara too, her friendship's what we prize
Now if you choose to stick around we'll dream up bigger lies*

*But oh cash, cash, cash
Stored deep in vaults below
Where soon you'll learn to spend your time
Counting all your dough*

*Oh Ronnie, my Ronnie, Oh how you hit those balls
When you can keep your shoulder good And not collide with walls
These last two years have brought some fun, To Mara you owe thanks
She helped to make your handsome son, while all you shot were blanks*

*The cash will fill a dozen banks
And one more just for show
Yet with it all you'll need four years
Just to count your dough*

*Oh Ronnie, Oh Mara, we hate to see you go
And Adam too, yes it is true, we've come to love you so
At home we'll shed some quiet tears, Your leaving us the cause
To soon you will be on your way, may all the world be yours*

*Each bank we pass will bring to mind
You've gone to Chicago
So even if the place pans out
You still can count your dough.*

Commentary: A few months after Bernice and I were married, Mara and Ronnie Blomberg (A Yankee and the first DH in baseball history) moved to the apartment next door. We became friends and had many great, memorable, fun times together. I learned first-hand how people act in the presence of celebrities, and Ronnie was indeed charismatic. Then Ronnie was traded to Chicago and I wrote this in the style of Walt Whitman's, *Oh Captain, My Captain* because I really was so sad to see him go. I read it like a Mafia Godfather at a farewell dinner party they

gave. Running with Ronnie, who was a great sprinter, showed me that I didn't even have the right to dream of making the Olympics.

Daddy (Rueben) at Sixty

February 1978

*The man whom we honor is Rueben R.
A milestone he has just passed
In far better shape than that of his car
Which no one will ever outlast*

*When driving Big Blue he's just like a king
His feelings we then dare not jostle
By asking, "When will you junk the old thing?
It's lasted so long it's a fossil."*

*His heart's strong as iron, but better than gold
He outwalks both Sandra and Lance
There's no way to tell that he's sixty years old
Except by the age of his pants*

*On the corner of Main his dry goods store
Can outfit a student or farmer
With clothes that date back to the Persian War
And a wide selection of armor*

*The children he treasures, you know what they're like
Marilyn's light as a feather
Bernice is so steady that she married Stan
Who cannot predict the weather*

*Jack went to Denver to flee from his fate
But Ellen soon cornered the fool
Sandra and Lance both acquired some weight
What's Barry still doing in school?*

*I could go on teasing but I have been told
To end on a serious note
So something you cherish we'll soon let you hold
But first you must put on a coat*

The folks who all love you worked day and night

*To help make this party a smash
No one would deprive you of your basic right
That is, you may take out the trash.*

Commentary: Written for Rueben Rosenberg's 60th birthday party in Statesboro Georgia, which we didn't attend. Rueben, a very loving but conservative man, owned a dry goods store that looked like it was still the 1930's, wore old style clothes from the store, drove an ancient car we called Big Blue, and insisted on taking out and inspecting the garbage. The party was given by Sandra, his daughter, who was briefly married to Lance, who never walked further than to the car.

Morris Klein at Forty

April 1979

Thank back today on what life's been.
Think of what still lies before you.
The joys you've felt the things you've seen
Yet we know why today you're blue.

Each day was an exciting page
Each year a great adventure
But now that you've reached middle age
All life is one huge debenture

Yes, forty is a milestone
But no need yet for a stretcher
There's only been a change of tone
You're now a dirty old lecher.

To sum it up, don't get depressed.
And don't feel that we are haughty.
We really wish you all the best.
For, some year we will turn forty.

Commentary: We met the Kleins during a sabbatical year (1978-79) in Israel at Tel Aviv University and our families have been close friends ever since. Over the course of the ensuing 40+ years I have written several poems for the family, usually for birthdays. Morris convinced me to attend Ulpan Hebrew Language class, which proved extremely helpful and a unique experience.

Somehow this poem was misplaced for almost 40 years in the desert.

Reverently in Hymietown

24 February 1984

*In his presidential bid
The reverend Jesse met a Yid
At least that's what he said he did*

*But then his memory came up short
When he saw he'd lose support
If by chance he'd e'er get caught*

*The trail just doused another fire
A man that some hoped would inspire
Is now a bigot plus a liar.*

Commentary: After a long unpoetic gap I wrote this. I never liked Jesse Jackson. In 1984 he came to CCNY and helped raise the high general resentment level among the African American students, particularly toward Jewish Professors like moi. Teaching introductory meteorology, which I had liked, became unpleasant for all the resentment. Later I discovered I played some role in rousing the hostility (by craving approval from students), which fortunately faded after 1990. Now (2005), CCNY is a truly international school and I love teaching all its students.

Aaron's Bar Mitzvah

16 March 1985

*Aaron, I thought it fit to write a page
On your Bar Mitzvah, the coming of age
But first since you have grown so fast
I thought I'd tell you about your past
When you were two years old or one.
Playing with you was not much fun
By the time you reached the age of four
I'd say you were a total bore
But you were even worse at six
Remember all those 'magic' tricks?
When sports awakened you at eight
You'd miss a baseball with a gate
You made us pitch over again
And might have hit one ball by ten
At twelve we noticed something strange
Little Aaron began to change
You learned to program without a course
And started eating like a horse
You're growing faster than a weed
Soon your wrestling we'll have to heed
But today you davened like a man
Now you can do all that big folks can
So we feel sure you'll soon go far
With your own keys to dad's sports car.*

Commentary: Written for the Bar Mitzvah of the son of friends Terry and Steve. I think they asked me to write this. They certainly did ask me to write a similar poem for their second son, Jonathan a few years later and I did. This one is better, for I knew Aaron better considering that the Shapiros moved away to Stonybrook.

Love from North Carolina

12 February 1986

*It's been ten days since I went away
And now it's almost Valentine's Day
A fine man I am to leave you alone
To watch the kids when I'm out on my own*

*And while you're stuck with their screaming and crying
I'm living it up and having fun flying
Living foot-loose and fancy-free
Like the good old days at MIT*

*But if your memory just happened to fail
Remember I'm here on a mission named GALT
So not everything I've seen or done
Would be labelled adventure or fun*

*I've been taking the garbage and washing the dishes
Satisfying every one of a harried wife's wishes
I'm together with Jim both for work and for play
Yet not even once have I asked for a lay*

*If these are the things I do out of duty
Far more than I owe my love and my beauty
And that I love you deep and true
I realized after phoning you*

*For on the phone your sweet, soft voice
Told me I made the world's best choice
When I married you and made you mine
I found my life-long Valentine*

Aunt Anita at 70

Sung to the tune of I'm Looking Over a Four Leaf Clover
Summer 1987

*Who could be sweeter
Then dear Anita
The apple of our eye.*

*The moment you meet her
You simply could eat her
Oh no, she is starting to cry*

*We've come from a long way
To share your birthday
We love you that's why we're here*

*But now the first issue
Is get you a tissue
To dry each and every tear*

*Your strength we've relied on
Your shoulder we've cried on
You've smiled through it all*

*But act like a smarty
And throw you a party
Then all you can do is bawl.*

Happy Birthday

Commentary: I always loved my Aunt Anita Brill, although she was not sweet. But as her daughter, my cousin Joan stressed to me, Anita was sentimental to the extreme, crying at the drop of a hat.

Saga of Danny Quayle

Sung to the tune of "Davey Crockett"

August 1988, Printed in Village Times (East Setauket) September 8, 1988

*Born to a family rolling in kale
Partied as a youth and he drank some ale.
While lesser folk had to leave home or sail
He served during 'Nam with a mop and a pail*

*Danny, Danny Quayle
Prince of the campaign trail*

*While he's never searched for the Holy Grail
He supports defense like its been on sale
His moral pronouncements go beyond the pale
And he's proud he never went to jail*

*Danny, Danny Quayle
Prince of the campaign trail*

*He got C's and D's but he didn't fail
So what if his mind is a wee bit frail
His hair is red, he's hearty and hail
And the ticket needed a sexy young male*

*Danny, Danny Quayle
Prince of the campaign trail*

Commentary: This is one of my two poems that got published in a newspaper. The other made fun of a star sighting that was briefly interpreted as a UFO. I did not submit the poem myself, but Terry Shapiro did. I did not like Danny Quayle at all and was incensed that this undeserving man should be selected as vice president. However, I also feel strongly that the press went overboard in giving Quayle an undeserved reputation for stupidity.

Evan's (Second) Bar Mitzvah

April 1990

*"Dad, go away, I'm on the phone!
But while you're here I need a loan.
You see, tonight I've got a date.
You're driving us, so don't be late!
Then disappear, we might have fun!
Now get the dust cloth and vacuum!
And straighten up my messy room!
Don't just sand there like a baboon!
Make me lunch, I'll be hungry soon!"*

"Oh, I recall a different tune.

*Fourteen years ago today
Bernice was in the fam'ly way.
Our carefree days were soon to cease
Because of Evan and Elise
Some nine months later you popped out
Without a cry, without a shout.
While mommy laid there with a grin
You didn't breathe; my world caved in.
You didn't make a single peep
I should have known you'd be asleep.*

Yet other things would make me weep

*You started talking while a tot
You talked all day but just said "Hot"
Soon every time you saw a truck
You'd point to it and scream out, f---.
That wasn't what embarrassed me
So much as when you'd start to pee
On Broadway and Fifth Avenue.
And then insist I do it too.
You'd say to girls, "Take off your clothes"
And then to show them how you'd pose.*

You were a catalog of woes

*Because of what I never knew
I wanted you to speak Hebrew
At school they taught you all I'd missed
You taught them I'm an atheist
But now I'm stunned by all you know.
And how you play the piano
You draw like Michaelangelo
And swim so fast, you make me crow
There's just a single thing I wish
Before I die, you'd wash one dish"*

"Oh, Dad, you know that I hate fish.

*So why'd you serve this junk today
You never let me have my way
Its time now that you set me free
Although you still must pay for me
But now that I've become a man
I know I should do all I can
To help out and repay my debt.
I'll clean my mess, but not quite yet.
I'll do it when my mind is clear.
You pick the day, I'll pick the year."*

Commentary: Here is a poem of roasting and praising for my son, Evan on his Bar Mitzvah. Evan did no work around the house, but was multitalented. As a young man I never wanted children, but fell in love with them the moment they were born. I was astonished at the intensity of my feelings. When Evan was born he did not breathe for a full minute. Bernice was lying there happy as a lark unaware of the crisis while the doctors were frantically trying to clear his throat. I was petrified with worry. But everything turned out OK.

As for Evan's First Bar Mitzvah, it was conducted on Masada in Israel by my first cousin, David. It was the first Bar Mitzvah that David presided over as Rabbi. The second Bar Mitzvah was done in New Jersey for family members and friends, who would never have travelled to Israel.

Ted and Kate Lang's 50th Anniversary
1990

*When Ted met Kate
He had to wait
To get a date*

*For though Ted pled
Kate turned her head
Toward some pre-med*

*"My paper's late
I'll fail, its fate."
Ted heard from Kate*

*Ted stayed up late
Wrote something great
And won his mate*

*For then Kate said
You're so smart, Ted
It's you I'll wed*

*The shofar rang
Ted and Kate sang
We're now both Lang
(Let's start a gang)*

*But soon war led
Reluctant Ted
From his bride's bed*

*Kate said, Don't fail
Fore setting sail
To help make Dale*

*Did Ted agree!
Well, then said he
It's been such glee
When next I'm free
We'll make Steffy
And with Huey
We'll close with three
Plus Ph. D.*

*The years went by
The kids grew high
They learned to fly*

*More time went past
Grandkids amassed
Much, much too fast.*

*And now dear friends
This poem ends
For no one knows the rest
But Ted and Kate
Still look so great
The next fifty
Should be by far the best.*

Commentary: We were invited to the 50th anniversary party of the parents of my great friend, Huey Lang and wrote this ditty for it. Kate passed on a few years later but Ted lived on past 92, working as a well-regarded labor mediator until a day or two before he died and with a mind as sharp as ever. At least 50 years after he had taken Calculus he still remembered some of it. That blew me away. By the time I reach his age I will probably have been dead for 25 years, retired for 30, and senile for 40.

To Jonathan Shapiro on his Bar Mitzvah

30 May 1992

*Your mother is a DDS, your dad a PhD
At Harvard, brother Aaron's favorite word is me-me-me
So for 13 years your fate has been rank obscurity*

*What's it been like in that shade?
Have you worked or have you played?
What cute girl friends have you made?*

*Confess Jonathan, before it's too late
Tell precisely when you began to date
And which of these beauties will be your mate?*

*I see you smile but still keep quiet
For you only like to talk at night
Long after you have shut off the light*

*The secret's out, you're not so sly
You couldn't hide your twinkling eye
And by the way, zip up your fly*

*But let's end on more serious notes
Not about sowing your wild oats
Or about your political votes*

*Those glowing eyes have said to me
You really feel that you are free
To be just what you want to be*

*So now that you've duly passed the mitzvah bar
Set out joyfully and steer straight for your star
Which will only cost your parents one more car.*

Commentary: Jonathan was quiet but you could see in his dreamy eyes he really liked the girls. He married quite young for these times. This poem links to the one I did for his older brother, Aaron.

Elise's (Yagen's) Ride

Read with an Illustrated Map

27 June 1992

*Listen, my children and I shall tell
Of the all day ride of Elise Rachel
On the fifth of September in 89
I said "Since the weather is bound to be fine
And Rose just got home from intensive care
We are going to take a bike ride there
Mom will drive there and then bring us back
But this is getting me way off track*

*It is 30 long miles from Cliffside Park
We started early to arrive before dark
The sun was bad but the hills were the worst
For each one added to Yagen's great thirst*

*One day ahead we laid out the course
Taking the shortest route from the source
We started off going north on 9 West
Despite the traffic that road was the best
For on it Elise knew just where to buy
Life-saving drinks when her throat would run dry*

*Six miles later all the stores lay behind
"I'm thirsty, I'm thirsty, I'm thirsty", she whined
By plan I had packed frozen orangeade
"Oh Dad, may I eat it there in the shade?"
That magical potion kept her alive
But for how much longer could she survive?*

*We soon reached the crest of the Palisades
In silence, in Alpine, with no grand parades
We turned our bikes west on Closet Dock Road
To coast downhill and reap what we sowed
But to our dismay, one final steep hill
Reared its cruel face to test Yagen's will*

*The next two miles were easy as pie
She did them so fast I thought she would fly
But I had a worried look in my eye
Fearing that ever she fell she might die
In a flash I pictured the very same place
She once fell from her bike and onto her face
When I let her ride down a small slope a five
I surely was lucky she still was alive*

*By noon Elise said, "I need to have lunch."
So we stopped at Closter just on the hunch
That Jerry would join us for all the fun
But he had already eaten a ton
So we pedaled until the sun drew high
And stopped for a soda and pizza pie.
"I feel really good daddy, I must confess."
She left really fast without cleaning her mess.*

*We started again on roads that were flat
And glided along and had a nice chat
Turning westward once more, the hills grew real steep
For the longest time then Elise didn't peep.
Till she turned to me with a face full of sorrow
And said, "Daddy dear, by this time tomorrow
I'll be dead and my soul will be in heaven
Unless you can find me a 7-11."*

*A moment later the sign came in sight
The store on the left with a park on the right
She slurped up her slurpee and swung on the swings
And we talked about the silliest things
We played and relaxed for almost an hour
For the very next hill was as high as a tower
With no trees to shade Elise from the sun
"Oh, Daddy, Oh, Daddy, this is no fun."
She sagged off her Jumper, sweat poured from her brow
"Oh, Daddy, I wish we were at Sandra's now."*

Then I grew nervous, my heart turned and tossed

*"Where is the Garden State Parkway, I'm lost?"
Just then the Parkway appeared on a bridge
Riding the backbone of old Chestnut Ridge
"Its downhill, Elise, you have good cause for hope."
But Elise had come to the end of her rope
"Twenty five dollars if you find a quarter."
I said to prod her, but she just croaked, "Water!"
Which we found at the nearby police station
Then walking biked we gained elevation.
I pointed out the sights along the West Road.
Elise only said, "I need to be towed."*

*The town was full of houses so pretty
I said, "Elise t sure is a pity
I do not have the financial goods
To buy us a home here in these woods."*

*Then Elise looked down and saw a stream
And answered me as if in a dream
"I'd gladly give the last drop of my blood...
Just to dring from that stream and lie in its mud."
One short year later her wishes came true
But I'm deep in debt, so what else is new?*

*We reached New York State but then saw Smith Hill.
'Oh, Dad, I never knew muscles could kill.
Please bury me here in the yard of this church."
I said, "I'll never leave you here in the lurch
For there cross the road is the old Airmont deli
I'll buy lemon ices to fill up your belly."*

*With the sweet taste of lemon still on her tongue
Elise pedaled quickly and then out she sung
"Oh, Dad, riding fast is so easy for me."
I decided not to mention gravity
She zoomed downhill with a feeling so fine
We purchased no drink at Route 59*

At the Thruway we drew within sight of our goal

*But there straight ahead lay one small final knoll
Which we topped and breezed to the house in the dell
Elise sprang up sprightly and rang the door bell
Oh, you should have seen the look of surprise
And the beautiful gleam in her mother's eyes
Elise she related the tale I just read
Mnow all's done, except for the postscript ahead.*

Postscript

*A few short weeks later I took the same ride
But this time there was no Elise at my side
I rode much, much faster, but when it was done
I realized it hadn't been quite so much fun
For I'd gotten to know my daughter that day
And I wouldn't have her any other way.*

Commentary: This long bat mitzvah poem for my daughter Elise was based on an all-day bike ride we took the year before from Cliffside Park, NJ to Suffern, NY where Bernice's sister Sandra was living. And, just as you can follow Longfellow's poem, ***The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*** with a map, so you can follow this poem with a map, which Elise's brother Evan constructed showing the trail we took that day. It was one of the most memorable days I ever spent with my daughter and I think she will long remember it too.

After this poem, I stopped writing poems for almost a decade. I didn't like the egotistical feelings I got when I read my poems at public events. The decade that followed was not happy for me. Mourning over the death of my father combined with male menopause, financial worries, and troubles at CCNY, where it seemed I would be laid off in a programmatic move during a time of fiscal exigency for NYC.

Dying Dad

Sept-Oct 1993

*Now that you're sick
And lying on your back
We like to come and visit you
Sure it was more fun
When you could play and run
But then you would ignore us
While now you still don't bore us
Oh, well I remember the days when we were young
and you were funny
It almost made up for our lack of money
Each week I got a precious dime
While Jack you only gave the time
And Rob enjoyed a life of crime
Lightening your wallet
So what is the result that followed?
While you slept on top of Kippy
I followed every rule and regulation
Jack became an outcast hippie
And Rob discovered inebriation
But we transformed this with our tricks
The rules I turned to science
Jack put music in his defiance
And Rob now sells the world a fix
In short we've all a portion of panache
Even though this poem's trash.*

Commentary: This is an unfinished poem that I wrote as Dad lay dying of pancreatic cancer. Buying a house that I felt was a financial burden in the midst of a small recession, facing my father-in-law's brain tumor and subsequent stroke and Radiation therapy, then my Dad's cancer, all mixed with problems and threats to my job and career that briefly erupted in 1990 and then the major eruption from 1994 to 1997 left me greatly shaken. These were the worst years of my life aside from adolescence as a displaced person from 7th grade to my junior year in high school.

Kippy was our beagle dog. There is a photo somewhere of my father sleeping on his back on a couch while Kippy was sleeping right below him on his back on the floor under the couch.

I never showed this to Dad (or to anyone). I never asked my father many questions I should have.

Lost Touch

24 June 2001 0330 EDT Atlanta, GA Jack Rosenberg's House

*I think its plain for all to see
I've lost my touch in poetry
A fact that everybody knows
Is, older poets turn to prose
And now I look on as my son
Spews out his poems one by one
Oh why, I ask must it be so
That aging makes our passion go
A young man when he finds a theme
Converts it naturally to a dream
For young hearts make ideas burn
When each pore makes you lust and yearn
Only if I awake at night
Do I see a similar light
Then I ask in a voice grown soft
How it happened that I turned off
I hope I have another chance
To turn my walk back to a dance.
Before it's my turn to be dead
But now I'll get back into bed
Without an answer to my quest
Except I need to sleep-to rest
I'll check this out after the dawn
On the slight chance my heart's reborn*

Commentary: This is the first poem with any merit I wrote after Elise's Bat Mitzvah. Half a year earlier around Y2K I had an angioplasty after experiencing angina at Cuzco, Peru. This left me riddled with anxiety about my imminent death. I was convinced the angioplasty would not last and it didn't. In May 2002 I needed heart bypass surgery.

I wrote this poem after awakening in the middle of the night with an inspiration. Sleeping brings out some of my best thoughts and most creative ideas. This is why I never woke my students (actually I threw chalk or anything handy at them to wake them for the nerve of sleeping in my class).

At the time, my son, Evan had taken over the role of family poet laureate. He does not devote the time I do to poetry, probably because he keeps so busy, but he has all the talents and writes more

loving poems than I do. Both my and his poetic skills seem to have sprung almost fully formed from the start, as did Athena.

Empty Nest Syndrome

04 August 2001 0015 EDT

*My son and daughter both have fled
And each room bears an empty bed
But I have left so much unsaid*

*The piano rests out of tune
With neither kid to play it soon
The only one to play is me*

*It's odd that I should feel forlorn
I didn't before they were born
But now I do its plain to see*

*If I review the job I've done
I should have had a lot more fun
But it's not easy to feel free*

*I felt trapped at times like my dad
But I did good he wished he had
And so I feel both proud and glad
I was as good as I could be*

*Now it is up to each grown kid
To do better than their dad did
And make their apples pass the tree*

Commentary: Another sad poem about the empty nest and regrets at some of my failures – this time as a parent. Actually I was a pretty good father except for my sadness of the prior years that rubbed off on my son. I consider it an accomplishment that I was a much better father than my father. In the past few years, many people have raised their estimation of me because our kids have turned out so happy and accomplished.

On to the Cutting Board

Thursday 23 May 2002, 5:30 EDT

*If I should be one of the unlucky few
Who do not manage to make it through
With so much left in life to do.
Just don't miss me, for I won't miss you.*

*And on those days you do miss me.
Just think that I have gone to sea
Or hiked up in Yosemite.
And will be back in two weeks or three.*

*My passing is not fact but rumor
My heart was strong, I had no tumor
I loved my life and kept my humor
And my portion of years was much more
Than I ever could have expected*

*But if you see me wake again
Bear with me through all my pain
I'll try to never once complain
For each day with you will be my gain
And much more than I could have expected.*

Commentary: I had gentle but convincing symptoms of angina despite two years of Spartan eating habits, and constant exercise and anxiety. The morning of my heart surgery I awoke with this poem in my mind and wrote it to my wife, Bernice very quickly. Bernice would have to tell you if I lived up to my promise - perhaps she'll lie on my behalf.

This surgery and the subsequent recovery led to a sustained renewal of my poetic efforts. I had been very secretive about my angioplasty, not wanting to reveal any suggestion of weakness at CCNY, where my job still seemed at risk. But after the heart surgery, when the situation was clearly better at CCNY, and where there was no longer any sense in covering up, I sent the poem to several friends and relatives.

Bill Pierson at 80

12 July 2002

*Old Bill Pierson's still like a kid
Just look at all the science he did
And I'm not just referring to the way he was
Cause you can still see the good science he does
But the best thing by far 'bout the son of a gun
Is at the age of eighty he's still making it fun*

Commentary: Written for the 80th birthday party given for Bill Pierson, a great scientist, who remained active up to almost the day of his death one year later. I missed this party because of complications (Dressler's Syndrome) following my heart surgery. Bill was a role model in many ways. His heart problems dated over almost 3 decades and he treated them without the fear I constantly felt. Bill was responsible for the field of modern wave forecasting and one of his proudest accomplishments is that he was first to notice and report the classic hook radar echo. But it was during World War II and his report was classified and buried.

Free of Advice

14 Sept 2002

*If you work 20 hours a day
Something's sure to give
You've more than earned the right to play.
Now go and seek your way to live.*

*When you came to me, your loving dad
And asked permission to be free.
My answer made you very sad.
But now the problem's you not me.*

*No longer do I have the right
To tell you what to do.
The time has come to see the light.
You're free to start the game anew.*

*When work becomes a boring grind.
Leave it with no trace of fear.
Treat yourself and what you'll find
Is a life that you'll hold far more dear.*

*Long hard years spent on the run
Will sap your innate verve
Give yourself more time for fun
It's the least that you deserve.*

*Take the time to look around
And when you've found your groove
Your feet will float above the ground
Who gives a damn if I approve.*

*By now I think you've had your fill
But know my words do have their price
For it would be far better still
If I could heed my own advice.*

Commentary: My normally ebullient daughter, Elise felt dispirited because of conflicts at work. I must have made some heavy remarks that did not help her at all to say the least. So I wrote this poem urging that she feel free to do whatever she wanted in life. Elise's nickname is Yagen, based on my interpretation of a sound she made as an infant.

Blessings to Ward Hindman at Sixty
28 Sept 2002

*Sixty is a milestone
Anybody would postpone
But if you asked an optimist
There would be blessings on his list
Here by chance are just a few
Let me read them out to you*

*Getting older ain't no fun
When your life is almost done
When the best things you can find
Are only real inside your mind
But just because there's nothing left
We don't want you to feel bereft*

*A ray of hope's been left for you
By sixty we forgot what's true.*

*Sixty is a regal age
At which you've reached a lofty height.
With blood pressure way off the gage.
And eyes too weak to see the sight.*

*Your status is without a peer.
You've mastered each and every art.
Thank God that you no longer hear
The thumping of your failing heart.*

*You've learned at long last to have fun
And cast aside all troubles weighty
Because by long comparison
You know that life's much worse at eighty.*

Commentary: My colleague and friend, Ward Hindman, multitalented meteorologist, sailplane pilot and singer turned 60 and gave a great party, for which I wrote this roast. Now that I have turned 60 (almost 76 at the time of this compilation) it doesn't seem so funny.

Jack in Court

01 October 2002

*I take to heart what you say to me.
I hear the rage in your voice.
So when I choose to disagree
Is mute silence a better choice?*

*If you view the world as evil
And all people fit for hell
Then all you do is kill
The chance of feeling well.*

*The only way to fix
The evil that is there
Is to recognize a mix
Of good - then show some care*

*Look upon each person clearly
Note their rage and lust.
But allow some generosity.
With a trace of love and trust.*

*Am I so pure that I should preach?
I have more to learn than to teach.
I know I've often chosen flight.
Where it might have been better to fight.*

*But when I listen to you
Expound such a horrid view
I cannot be wrong to advance
The notion to give peace a chance.*

*When someone has caused you harm
If you heed your knee jerk call to arm
You may succeed and get them back
But it will prompt one more attack
And when that fulfills your prophecy.
It will be your only victory.*

Commentary: My brother, Jack is Bipolar. When he is manic he is hostile. For years he hasn't been able to hold a job but has had no trouble appearing in court. I won't go further. The poem says enough.

Beauty and the Bum

04 October 2002

*Here they come, Beauty and the Bum
Her sparkling gown, his shirt spotted brown
Her glorious train, his tie's faded stain
Her visage divine, his pants bottoms shine
Her beauteous soul, his sock's gaping hole
Her shoes fitted neat, his dun sneakered feet.
Her slow regal walk, his jacket's caked chalk
She passes by and every man whistles.
Ladies wince at his minefield of bristles
How can she take him anywhere?
But when he is there she glides by on air
And floats on a bubble immune to his rubble
Cause under those rags he's loving and trim
And that is why she can't live without him.*

Discussion: This poem was inspired by the fact that I am almost always unfashionable in my dress and sometimes the cause for a good laugh while my wife, Bernice always looks beautiful and well-dressed when we go out. Bernice liked this poem. Its rhythm is different than other poems I have written.

Oh Pretty Rehab Nurses

14 December 2002

*Oh, pretty rehab nurses, My time with you is done
And so I write these verses, Because its been such fun.
When I appeared three months ago, My body was a mess
My whole chest ached, my gait was slow, I couldn't handle stress
But oh heart, heart, heart.
With cleared up artery
Your expert care was off the chart
It's been so good for me.*

*My muscles all had jellified My sternum felt like granite
Until I walked by Kelly's side and sped my pulse with Janet
From pain at last I now am free, no matter what the weather
The cure has been a dose or three of Alix, Mar'lyn, Heather
Now heart, heart, heart.
It plain for all to see
The beautiful and very smart
Nurses who remodeled me.*

*Oh charming rehab nurses Because of what you do
I've bypassed all reverses, And in good health pulled through.
So, Colleen, Catherine, Kathleen, who monitored my chart.
The greatest change you've made has been, The way you've won my
heart.
Dear ladies of the heart.
Who restored my former glee
Perhaps our ways will part
But I will stay in love with thee.*

Discussion: After my heart bypass, I got Dressler's syndrome, an inflammation of the pericardium. This setback scared the wits out of me and humbled me into taking cardiac rehab because I simply could not monitor myself. This was a good program run by a number of dedicated rehab nurses. So I wrote them this poem as a gift, but left before they saw the poem. I have only seen one of them since, but should go back and thank them again. At the age of 60, I completed my first and only triathlon.

This was the second poem I wrote in the style of Whitman's *Oh Captain, My Captain*

Rejected Proposal

≈ 20 December 2002

*It is the season to be jolly
But I'm incensed at RF's folly
While others celebrate I can't
I'll have to write another grant
So when they party I fume instead
About exorbitant overhead
Fringe benefits of course come first.
For their fraud may they all be cursed.
But the Provost demands yet one more line.
Before His Arrogance will stoop to sign
On top of fringe and Overhead's crime
All grants are padded with release time
This allows the Provost to claim by force
That he's released us from a course
This unmerited fealty brings delight
To that administrative parasite
The ponderous grant is too rich say I
Provost: "Then cut your pay or let it die."
Even his AA's know to say
"Why not give up your summer pay!"
Because they want it sent their way.*

*Six months later the grant was lost.
Rejected as too great a cost.
Next proposal I think may fly
But no way from CCNY.*

Discussion: The provost at CCNY insists that release time be padded into every grant. Even though the grant we were applying for had a limit above which we would be kicked into a much tougher category, the provost didn't care. Of course, release time was a phony device to suck more money out of the funding agencies.

The Research Foundation is another bureaucratic organization that takes its undue share of an engorged overhead. All the people at RF are friendly and competent. All do a good job and all should be fired. But the RF is the Port Authority of CUNY and it will outlive the planet.

That was the last proposal I wrote for CCNY. My 60th birthday present to myself was that I would never write another proposal other than the simple one for PSC CUNY that is almost automatic. I lived up to my word.

A Principal's Reflections on a Suburban School Day

To Vanessa Smith, Principal

Dorchester School, Woodcliff Lake

06 May 2003

*I'm on my way before the morn
The roads are dark, the school
forlorn
And when I switch my office light
I look outside and it's still night*

*Teachers arrive before the sun.
Preparing for each day of fun.
They beautify their rooms and
yearn
To help the children grow and
learn*

*Six hundred children - even more
Come flitting past my office door
While I with smile watch them all
Pump life into the now-full hall*

*No day runs as smooth as oil
Rapid growth mandates turmoil
Each day dragons must be slayed
Each cut needs the right band aid*

*Teachers come with ruffled
feathers
Strained by legalistic tethers
Some kids they'd surely like to
strangle
I guide them toward a gentler
angle*

*Next is the nervous parents' turn
I mollify their deep concern*

*Showing how well their children
fare
Under our expert, guiding care*

*I also sometimes feel great pain
And wish that I too could
complain
But a principal must confide
In herself and bear grief inside.*

*Then give to each a hearty
greeting
Words to inspire ev'ry meeting
Write programs, proposals and
reviews
Keeping abreast of all crucial
news.*

*A principal's labors never cease
Sometimes nightfall won't bring
release
But days are filled with
unmeasured joys
Of delicious little girls and boys*

*They cry, they laugh, they
graduate
And lucky that it's been my fate
To help their minds light up on
fire
When I see them I can't retire.
But ten years now I've run the
show
The time has come for me to go.*

*For me it's been a thrilling run.
No greater prize could e'er be
won.*

Postscript

*So next year stop and think of me
When you're at work and I am
free
And most of all I'd have you know
Oh, all the places I will go!*

Discussion: This poem was written for the retirement of Bernice's principal, who never liked me. In fact, I got strong vibes she disliked me. But she loved Bernice and I think she was a good principal based on all Bernice said. So I wrote this poem, which Bernice read at her retirement dinner.

With few changes the poem is generic, as I intended.

Look: Don't Touch

17 May 2003

*Every time that we go anywhere
There will be beautiful women there
And though their beauty will make me stare
You are the beauty for whom I care.*

Discussion: Following a retirement dinner for Bernice's colleague at which Bernice read a plaque and looked so beautiful and regal. I have always ogled beautiful women.

To the Adventurous Rosenbergs

23 November 2003

*We promised that we would let you know
That this Christmas we have arranged to go
To the sunny nation of Mexico.*

*We want you to join us but I think we will lose
We know the only vacation you ever choose.
Is one where you can stay seated and feed - a cruise.
So please do not tell us why you have to refuse.*

*We land in DF on December Twenty Four
And travel around for 10 days or more
See mountains and temples then head south to the sea
In Escondido with our family.*

*We'll surf and bask on the white sandy beach.
While such adventure remains past your reach.
You'll miss us we know but you will not roam.
We'll miss you also but we won't stay home.*

Discussion: This not too gentle satire had no effect at all. Over the past 20+ years we have invited members of both families to our international vacations. None of Bernice's siblings ever came until our stay in Spain in 2007-08. Bernice's father did come to Israel in 1979 when we spent a year there because Bernice threatened to kill him if he didn't. With one exception, the Rosenbergs will go on cruises. Bernice's oldest sister, Marilyn treated the border of Georgia as the outer limits of the solar system and did not consider herself to be an astronaut.

For our Mexican Vacation we actually stayed at Puerto Escondido, which had fantastic 8-foot high waves. I body surfed the somewhat smaller waves and chickened out with the big ones.

A Sick Friend's Gift

To my beautiful but sad son, Evan
15 March 2004

*When young we seldom see
Life gives no guarantee.
So now that your close friend
Is forced to face his end.
You also feel depressed.
Permit me to suggest
That through a time of grief
We all deserve relief.
It's good then to distract
Our minds from each sad fact.
Some hide their heads in work
While others choose to shirk.
Some look for help above
While I would look for love.
We all know there's a cost
When heart is tempest tossed
As pretty girls reject
The joys we scarce suspect
But if we do not try
And risk the chance to cry
We make the greatest sin
We forfeit hope to win.
So brace yourself young man
And do all that you can
To seek out your allure.
For only then I'm sure
Can pain be laced with fun.
And that's when life has won.*

Commentary: One of Evan's friends in Med school got Hodgkins. At present it appears to be in remission and the fellow is OK. But it got Evan down and I wrote this to pick Evan up.

Morris Klein at 65

04 June 2004

*Our Morris is now 65
A dinner we propose
Let's celebrate that he's alive
And roast him till he glows*

*"Say something nice - it is his day"
Sue made me swear to try
But I can't find a thing to say
Because I never lie.*

*But wait - We're all put here on Earth
For much too short a stay
I'll find some good he's done since
birth.
Muse help me please, Oy Vey!*

*The truth I will not compromise
But what then can I do
If I can't lie I'll plagiarize
From parents and from Sue.*

*Dave left his life in Hungary
From Poland Ethel fled
They came to Hudson to be free
And this is what they said.*

*"Oh Morris life for us was cruel
We didn't drive or play
We sent you in our place to shul
To ruin your Saturday."
"We closed the shop and you know
why
We felt so proud dear son
You finished first in Hudson High,
First in a class of one."*

*"We bused you way up to Cornell
Too far to visit you
We feared your soul had gone to hell*

For that's where you met Sue."

*"Of course, we criticized at first
We let you know our views
We yelled at you - we fumed, we
cursed
Our minds were fixed - we're Jews."*

*"But when you packed and went out
west
We knew Sue was for real.
And when two kids filled up your
nest
We loved Sue in the deal."*

*At work you claimed you did quite
well
You served your land with pride
Just what you did no one can tell
Thank God it's classified.*

*You built your house from ground up
and
You also are a plumber
You planted veggies on your land
Though weeds took charge each
summer.*

*You served your synagogue for years
As president and more
Your sermons brought your friends to
tears
Each was a supreme bore.*

*Your kids thought that the goals you
set.
For them were small in size
One CEO to pay your debt
One tiny Nobel Prize*

*But then the Soviets unwound
And though the world turned calm
Your deep depression was profound
With no one left to bomb*

*And now we hear that you avoid
To drive in light and dark
Because you are quite paranoid
That you must pay to park*

*So in both sunshine and in rain
To library and garden
You sit there calmly on the train
And feel your art'ries harden.*

*You're closing in upon your end
But that don't mean you're through.
You're one great father, mate, and
friend
And that's why we love you*

Commentary: Susan asked me to write a poem for Morris's upcoming 65th birthday party, an event coupled with his beautiful daughter's ordination as rabbi. I asked Susan to write me about Morris's life and she gave me a whole history with many details I didn't know or remember, so not only was I able to write the poem, which took much effort and time, but I got to know my friend better. I used the highlights in the poem, always with the view of a roast that captured essential truths. Sue begged me to say something nice and was very worried that I would roast Morris, so with a rebellious feeling of defiance that is exactly what I did. But I think he enjoyed it to some degree. Hell, it's a good poem. I also wrote a poem roasting Morris when he turned 40

As it turned out, everyone really liked this poem.

Application Essay to Berkeley Business School

Started 16 November 2004 Revised 18 November 2004

*I do not wish to brag
Because it is a drag
For other folks to read
Great deed after great deed.
But this essay compels
That each applicant tells
The best things he has done
And make it sound like fun.
From when I was a kid
I'll tell you what I did
I learned to swim at two
But that's not all I do.
I read at four or less
I'm bright, I must confess
I'm independent too
Am I impressing you?
I learn right on the spot
Like any polyglot
In art I'm an aesthete
And each athletic feat
Is mere surpassing great
But I've more on my plate
I cook, I bake, I stitch
I've earned so much I'm rich
I play and sing on tune
At work I'm a tycoon*

*I've mastered French and Math
In short I set the path
My spirit brings folks mirth
I've traveled round the earth
And every place I went
I was the main event
I'm savvy and I'm shrewd
I'm tough but never crude
In fact I'm so refined
I'm often wined and dined
By high placed diplomats
And courted by fat cats
Who recognize my skills
Will help them fill their tills
I always innovate
Yet I cooperate
So things run smooth as cream
When I work on a team*

*A Shakespeare I am not
But still you get the plot
That you would be a fool
To keep me from your school
Because I what I'll be
When I'm done with Berkeley.*

Commentary: In the fall of 2004, Elise applied to Berkeley Business School. She had trouble starting a personal essay, so I offered her this poem in its place. Understandably, she did not use it. Ultimately she was rejected. I have a feeling the poem was the cause even though she didn't use it.

Slave of Duty

21 November 2004

Responsibility

Responsibility

If you wish to be free

Saying "No" is the key

"I need your help today"

Is what they always say.

Just tell them, "Go away

You know I'd rather play"

Responsibility

Responsibility

If you wish to be free

Saying "No" is the key

Come on now and confess

You make your life a mess

By promising them, "Yes"

You sure don't need that stress

Responsibility

Responsibility

If you wish to be free

Saying "No" is the key

Hear no cry, watch no faint

Ignore ev'ry complaint

Never let their woes taint

The town that you must paint

Responsibility

Responsibility

If you wish to be free

Saying "No" is the key

Tell them plain "I am done

I've worked and slaved a ton

It's my time to have fun

Because I'm number one."

Responsibility

Responsibility

Ain't it great to be free

To say "Yes" just to me.

Commentary: As our mom, Rita has gotten a bit older she has gotten a bit (Ha!!!) more demanding of attention. When my brother Robert got stressed out over the situation, I wrote this to help him feel free to say no every once in a while. I also have difficulty saying no. Rob liked it.

Giant Steps

27 November 2004

*I cannot believe my ears or my eyes
You're getting engaged - oh what a surprise!
You kept such a secret, we hadn't a clue
Who'd have suspected it's a thing you would do?
We've heard you share quarters and sleep in one bed
It makes sense you're planning one day to get wed.
We'll learn long after, its quite plain to see
After you have raised a large family
But we'd sure like to know before we are
Called by your grandkids Greatgrandma and pa*

Commentary: Elise and Jeff moved so slowly and gradually towards announcing their inevitable engagement that it was not much of a surprise that it would happen. So about 4 months before they finally announced it, I wrote this. I did not show it to them until the eve of their wedding on 17 July 2005.

Possible added lines 25 June 2005

The ring is on the tip of her finger
But one moment longer I think that I'll linger.

Baseballs Swollen Legacy

Poem Started 18 March 2005

*What do you think could inspire
Me to write about McGwire?
A man who carved out his great mark
While keeping us all in the dark.
In 98 his name filled the tabloids
Less than he filled his veins with steroids.*

*How can we tell if the rumors are true?
To find hints of steroids what can we do?
The answer is simple - Its not a blood test we need
Just time the films of his changing bat speed.*

*But why focus on poor Mark McGwire
He's not the only major league liar
So many others should earn our ire.
Sammy Sosa, everyone loved you too
Despite the drugs we now know that you do.
Barry Bonds, your homers outpaced your sulk
Did we ever ask why you look like the Hulk
The one 'honest' player is Giambi
But his lawyers told him don't talk for free*

*Now that Jose Canseco has fessed.
To beef up sales of his*

Commentary: It goes without saying that the steroid pandemic in Baseball destroyed the integrity of all statistics. It pissed me off. For years an asterisk was applied to Roger Maris's home run record because of the extra games. Now a hypodermic should be applied to steroid records. I just ran out of inspiration to continue this poem. Perhaps I should continue it on steroids.

Wedding Wishes to Elise

25-26 June 2005

*Elise, you grew so big and pretty
Before you moved to SF city
So far away from mom and me
You wisely chose your odyssey
Once there you started out anew
And met the man who's just for you
Remember all your days the way
You feel when you're with Jeff today
Keep him the center of your life
A haven from the harsh world's strife
Your ear when no one else will hear
A mate whose love dispels all fear
And if you can do this you will
Have found the way to keep time still.*

Commentary: This was written for the wedding of my daughter, Elise to Jeff Falk. Jeff is a quiet, thoughtful guy who is proud to let Elise take center stage. The wedding, a beautiful affair, took place on 17 July, 2005. Almost everyone seemed happy and I certainly was. The poem makes an allusion to Andrew Marvel's *To His Coy Mistress*, a poem I love.

Dr. Principal Mighty Joe

April? 2005

*It's time for each of you to know
That now I'm DR. Mighty Joe
So gather round and I'll relate
The way I reached my lofty state.
I was a teacher at the start
But soon ambition swelled my
heart
Then I aimed to raise my station
With a higher education
I worked all day, I worked all
night
No wonder that I'm so up tight!
There wasn't any time to spare
To see my wife or breathe fresh air
And still I always fell behind
With stress so great I lost my mind*

*So what's life like as principal?
I have no friends nor ever shall.
With iron hand I run my school
I talk real tough and act real cruel
Inside the school I am the boss
I'm hard as nails; I rule by force
I'm very strict but oh, so fair.
I can't think of a kid I spare.
No boy or girl or little child
Has ever seen me wear a smile
I'd rather have a giant tumor*

*Than show one tiny speck of
humor
For I have learned in each career
Love doesn't work; what does is
fear
So when I choose to prowls the halls
The kids all cringe against the
walls
A kid who gets to bio late
I will abuse and violate
A kid who dares to tell ME, "No!"
Would find life sweeter on death
row
For now that I'm an Ed. D.
I give all kids the nth degree
And 'cause I bring each kid to
tears.
The days I'm sick the whole school
cheers.*

*My time is up - here comes the
food
Enjoy and eat; don't mind my
mood
Don't worry if I snarl and bark.
For that's the way I made my
mark.*

Commentary: In this harsh roast, Mighty invites us all to join him for dinner and hear his story. Mighty must remain anonymous, but I could only imagine the stresses any principal must suffer, especially when going for an Ed. D. at the same time.

Growing Up is Hard to Do: Rachel's Response

26 March 2006?

*Growing up is hard to do.
We don't admit it but its true.
The changes that we make are vast
They happen in a wink - so fast.
Our brain works hard to make us think.
Our body puts out smells that st_ _ _.
So when you feel you've no control.
Its sure to take a heavy toll.
On bodies, minds, and yes, on souls.
So in defense we shut our holes.
We do this but eventually
We're forced to open up and p_ _.
But the only way to feel real fit.
Is to move our bowels, that is to sh_ _.*

Commentary: My beautiful little cousin, Rachel, and I first got to know each other a bit when she spent an overnight with us years ago. When she came back she told her grandma, Mal, "I had fun with Bernice and the Big Boy." I guess I never grow up but Rachel has. She is 11 years old (as of Feb 2006). She had some stomach problems and got checked into the hospital. I was convinced the problem was emotional and was not worried about cancer, etc. So I wrote her the first poem (which she helped me finish) and we collaborated on the second poem. The first was done on the way to the hospital and the second was done in the hospital. Rachel wanted me to put both poems on the web, so here they are. They are scatological and crude, but almost everyone of almost every age likes such humor. It seems we never grow up - or perhaps it proves how grown up we are! After all, animals never laugh at their own bodily functions.

My Cousin, Stan

*My cousin, Stan is really dumb.
He dresses like a drunken bum.
People think he's really gross.
Just because he picks his nose.
He's so much fun, he's like a pet.
But every night his bed gets wet.
He's just as funny as a clown.
His underwear is streaked dark brown.
He eats his food from garbage pails.*

*And then he goes and bites his nails.
He eats no food, he just eats junk.
And so he smells just like a skunk.
Well, that's the story of his life.
So let's all stab him with a knife.*

Vain Ambition's Cure

19 April 2006 3:00 - 4:00 AM

*Is poetry better than prose?
I'm quite sure that nobody knows.
Should poems have meter and
rhyme?
Damn right they should, most of
the time.
My poems are witty and light.
I find that they're easy to write
Why then have I not won a prize?
They're not that good I must
surmise.
In any case I should feel great.
For anything I can create.
I can't compose like Bach or
Brahms.
My lectures don't inspire psalms.
My science is middling to fair.
I don't build or even repair.*

*I can't paint a portrait or draw.
I'm not fit to practice the law.
I neither can heal nor can cure.
My visage excites no allure.
In swimming, in biking, or track.
I find myself back in the pack.
I'm not shrewd and can't play
poker.
My humor is mediocre.
Yet I have no cause to complain.
My life's filled with more joy than
pain.
And though my skills are far from
great
It's enough to appreciate.
The great things that others can
do.
And most of all how I love you.*

Commentary: I was brought up in the shadow of (and named after) a dead hero, my mother's brother. I daydreamed myself as great in every way. Too bad, reality constantly interfered. I suppose I have my share of talents and abilities. But that doesn't count much when you are supposed to be the best out of 6 billion in every human endeavor. What set this poem going besides waking up at 2:40 AM probably with a sugar overdose, was listening to Stokowski's orchestration of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor last night. No way, no way ever I could even imagine writing such music. That was not my lot in life, as so many other lots weren't. Perhaps my entire orientation has been wrong. Is it resignation, or should I accept Candide's final viewpoint on life? And my grandfather, Saul, once urged me just before one of his operations to read Gray's Elegy in a Country Churchyard. For me a life lesson largely ignored for so many years and nowhere near fully learned yet.

Elise (Yagen) at 27

26 November 2006

*Oh, dear heaven, you're 27
How did the years go by?
And it is true, I'm 62
Oh my, the time does fly.*

*We cling to youth, but in all truth
We age cause time won't stay
But marches on, soon youth is gone
Some day we must make way*

*But now I see, you've great beauty
You're full of vim and verve
So fill your cup and drink it up
Throw time a changeup curve.*

Commentary: 26 Nov 2006 Here is a poem modeled after the poem "To His Coy Mistress" and written in the double rhyming method used in "The Ancient Mariner".

To Kwan-Yin Kong on Leaving CCNY

08 December 2006

Prelude

*You cannot wave a magic wand
To find the folks to whom you'll bond
And there are times you will be conned
But not by you - you've got me Kwanned*

*When people leave, the way I toast
Them is to grill them with a roast
So don't think I'm delirious
If now I'm mostly serious.
I'll be wan now that Kwan will be gone
I won't deny it. I loved your quiet.
So rich and deep with profound thought
Your soul cannot be bent or bought.
You're a gem of top quality
You meant all that and more to me
You've loved both music and the weather
And stuck with them despite all pressure
To have a practical career
And that too makes me hold you dear
And also why when in Camp Springs
You're bound to do some awesome things
So now go forth to your new life
But please, go out and find a wife!*

Commentary: Kwan-Yin Kong came to City College as a freshman almost 20 years ago, deeply interested in meteorology. Resisting his parents' plea to find a practical career, he stuck to meteorology. In college he also discovered the beauty of music and took up the piano. Self-trained, he has become a good pianist. In meteorology he has great insight, with both visual and mathematical talents, and a prodigious memory for storms that characterizes the best of weather nuts. After earning his MS in meteorology, he returned to CCNY as a research scientist. I greatly profited by association with him. Even though he is very quiet, he always managed to get his point across, which often involved profound thought. Now he finally got a position with NOAA, leaving the world of soft money (and me) behind. I do miss him.

For Amy Dym Da Rosa On the Occasion of her Baby Shower

02 June 2007

*On this card each painted flower
Opened at your baby shower
Grants your baby lifelong power
To relish living every hour.*

Commentary: We must have written this on a card illustrated with flowers. Here is a Hallmark Card style short poem, written for Amy, the beautiful and talented daughter of Sue Dym, who is also a talented poet and who teaches with my wife, Bernice. I was not invited to the shower.

Inspiration from Nature and Colleagues

30 June – 01 July 2007

*We all are creatures so complex
Propelled by drives that make us wrecks
That nothing e'er can guarantee
To cleanse our souls and set us free
Still love of beauty gives us pause
To follow any evil cause
For any form of light is love
That links us with angels above
So, lighting up others' vision
Is our crucial, sacred mission*

*We each see with unaided eyes
Optical wonders in the skies
Rainbows, halos, coronas, glories
We root out their secret stories
Then turn our gaze to ponds below
Or on the myriad shapes of snow
So stay enthralled as Wordsworth's child
With vision pure and undefiled
Yet when alone we do get tired
And need to be re-inspired.*

*So each 3 years we reconverge
To satisfy the basic urge
To share our findings and renew
Our spirits with each others' view
Like DNA our souls unwind
So that our insights are combined
And then revived with souls uncurled
We head out for the sorry world
Spreading nature's color and light.
And lo, we help it set aright.*

Commentary: We come to Light and Color in Nature meetings every 3 years from a world that has many troubles. During the intervening time, mostly alone we trudge on keeping and perhaps

spreading the faith, which may well help lives of others. Then at the meeting we join forces, minds, intuitions and sightings and are renewed in a common spirit. Finally, we return to the world refreshed with renewed vigor and impact. Who will know what lives we and other similar aficionados save and what wars we prevent through our love.

To Ward Hindman on His Retirement

14 July 2007

Every story my good friend
Has a starting point and end.
Forty years ago we met
But we weren't colleagues yet
Until twenty short years passed
Oh, the time goes by so fast
Twenty years ago this fall
You came and answered City's call
Your 20 years at EAS
For me were 20 of the best.
I knew that you were right to hire
You got things going, lit a fire

Your far flung vision helped me see
More in meteorology
And when each day of work was done
You found out more ways to have fun.
With no engine you take wing
And we love it when you sing
In summer you go sail the sea
Then, in winter, skate, or ski.
So if I strike a single chord
We've been darned lucky that you're Ward
And for all these reasons in the end
We are proud our colleague is our friend

Commentary: After 20 years of being colleagues and friends, Ward found that his excitement at teaching and research had diminished. He has now switched his focus to editing the Journal, Technical Soaring, and is doing his typically outstanding job. A few more words. When Ward came to CCNY I was all alone and running a foundering program in meteorology. Ward breathed new life into the program and prodded me into a higher state of activity and happiness. So, this sometimes grumpy and self effacing, but always interesting and hyperactive guy has earned my eternal gratitude. And in the poem below I only hint at his many talents and interests.

The Lion

Late 2007, 26 June 2008

*Every person on the street
Has two identities to meet
The first one is the conscious mind
But look below and you will find
A deeper world of hidden drives
That really lead us through our lives
The rational is but a gloss
The other makes us turn and toss
We use the first to plan and scheme
But it cannot create a dream
The first has let us fly above
The other makes us hate and love*

*There came a time when I lost hope
Through the dark I tried to grope
My path that once had seemed so clear
Was drowning in a sea of fear
But luck was standing at my side
I found a lion as a guide
Who led me back to day from night
And since that time I'm bathed in light.*

Elise's Baby Shower

07 July 2008

*I saw you at the time of birth
I saw you squirt out on the earth
I saw you playing in the tub
I saw you drowning glub, glub, glub
I saw you going for a splash
I saw you learn to swim, not thrash
I saw you in and out of water
I saw you growing my sweet daughter
I saw you heading out for France
I saw each time that you'd advance
I saw you climb high peaks above
I saw you find your way in love
I saw you swelling by some power
I saw you not at this your shower
I saw instead the fjords of Norway
And my heart that's looking your way.*

Commentary: One of Elise's friends gave her a Baby Shower when we were in Norway, far from California. I wrote this poem for the occasion even though I never would have been invited anyway since I am a man.

What a Wonderful Girl
To Rachel Irina Gedzelman

From "The Big Boy"
18 October 2008

*I saw Rachel play, night and day
Yet be amazed by things she'd say
So I think to myself, "What a wonderful girl."*

*I saw Rachel grow, steal the show
Her sense of joy had made her glow.
And I think to myself, what a wonderful girl.*

*We've all been blessed by this jewel from Russia
She's so delicious we all could crush her
She's enriched our lives right from the start
And that is why she's stole our heart.*

*I heard Rachel pray on Bat Mitzvah day.
I'm so proud of her in every way.
That I think to myself, what a wonderful girl
Yes, I think to myself, what a real grown up girl.*

Oh yeah!

Commentary: This poem was written for Rachel's Bat Mitzvah and sung to the tune of What a Wonderful World (copied below). Richie and Helen got up and accompanied me, and Richie sounded like Louis Armstrong, who I once almost met when my grandfather was in the hospital and Louis came to visit his accountant or lawyer in the next room. I didn't have the guts to say hello.

On the day of her Bat Mitzvah, when one of our cousins was called up to the Bimah and didn't know what to do, Rachel smoothed the gaffe with remarkable poise and concern. I was impressed.

Valentine to Death

14 February 2009

*My time is up I see it's clear
There's no doubt that it's drawing near
This thing I greatly used to fear
But other voices now I hear*

*So now that all my time is done
I'll list my regrets one by one
More times I played I should have won
Worked shorter, better, with more fun*

*Only now that my time has flown
I see at last what I've long known
We reap exactly what we've sown
I should not have felt so alone
And claimed for mine that which I own
Had thus I felt I would have shone*

Mariposa

07 April 2009

*"Every day I get much closer
To my gorgeous, precious Posa."
"As your father I oppose her
For each man around here knows her."
"She's my love, you can't depose her.
So I'm off to Mari-posa"*

Commentary: During a trip to Yosemite we passed through Mariposa. It occurred to me - Might I marry Posa?

*What do you think of seventy?
It no longer seems so old to me
I can't believe what I just said.
It's far off for me but not for Ed.*

*I could be mean but I'll be kind
I won't point out how you've
declined
Both in your body and your mind
Perhaps that's why the Bible says
After the age of 70
Each additional day is free
A gift beyond our span of days.*

*Before you launch your life anew
We'll take some time out to review
The life you've lived until this date
That life that brought you to this
state.*

*As a kid you were set adrift
So for yourself you had to shift
The question wasn't "Will I
thrive?"
But rather, "How can I survive?"
Who ever said that life is just
Tough going makes it tough to
trust.*

*Somehow you managed to pull
through
And turn into a man who's true
And that is why we honor you*

*Three girls without paternal blood
Found not a trickle but a flood
Of love and guidance through
their days
For this you've earned eternal
praise
In giving more than you received
That is something few have
achieved*

*Oh God, I've been so serious
Ed must think I'm delirious
So I must come back down to
Earth*

*And quickly tell you Ed's true
worth
That spending time with him's
such fun*

*Until he tells a joke or pun
So go on Ed, we are all ears
But first we raise a glass...and,
Cheers!*

Commentary: There are some people I find it easy to write poems about. Ed was one of them. Why? They typically must have some quirk of character, which makes them easy to caricature. Ed was untrusting but warm. He acted tough but he was kind. And more. The partner of Bernice's great friend, Sue Dym, Ed was content to take a back seat and let Sue shine even though he was witty. He just wasn't highly educated or schooled. I wrote about that later in a poem for Sue and Ed when they left New Jersey for North Carolina.

Sue Dym at Retirement

12-13 June 2009

*In writing this poem for you
The thing that I had to eschew
Was picking words rhyming with Sue
It's much too much easy to do.*

*I do have one much greater fear
My words you may not wish to hear
Of humor and truth they don't lack
But some of their color is black*

*So if you choose now to stay
I warned you, you should go away.
And now with no further delay
Here's what I am going to say*

*Sue, you're still energetic and fit
So why have you chosen to quit?
You made your decision sans pause
I think that we all know the cause*

*In the lush town of Woodcliff Lake
The school board made a big mistake
A town where birds rouse each
sunrise
And fragrant flowers feast the eyes
A town you walk from end to end
And every block you met a friend
That's what is called community
That's more the way it used to be
A town where great teachers would
stay
To prod the children's minds at play
Some of them are here today - they're
you
They've all come to celebrate Sue
For years you taught kids special
arts.
You grew their minds, you filled their
hearts.*

*Your dramas propelled each kid to
shine
To each of them you are divine
You opened them - then sails
unfurled.
You launched their ships to win their
world.*

*Only great teachers know the toll
It takes each day to pour your soul.
To kids whose problems drain your
cup
Then evenings grading keeps you up.
Teachers like that don't come for free
So when a town turns miserly
Those not fired quit when they can
Rather than face the hatchet man,
Who like Claud'ys smiles with glee
To cover his iniquity
That's ruined a pristine atmosphere
And ousted trust for naked fear.*

*The school board made quite an error
Buying cheap its reign of terror
It took two schools that thrived in
peace
And filled their halls with mind
police
Whose education is rather slim
Acquired with bias in gym.*

*Now, if your name don't end with a
vowel
You might as well throw in the towel
And if your religion ain't true.
(And if by some chance you're a Jew)
Count on it - your career is through.*

Fear is equal opportunity

*It aims at you and infects me
It infiltrates its way from the top
Making each official your cop
So even potentially nice gals
Cave in and lose their principles*

*The thing on which you can depend
Is, trust no one to be a friend
So as you watch over your shoulder
Each year makes you three years
older
The best way then to keep your fire
Is to get out - to retire
Leave behind those invisible gates
For a beautiful world awaits*

*The moment you're out you'll feel
fitter*

*Just don't look back, don't be bitter
You might do amazing things instead
Like finally marrying Ed*

*And you don't even have to pay me
To praise your great daughter, Amy
Who is more than the cream of your
life
Even though she's Fernando's wife.
I forget, isn't there one other?
Because your daughter's a mother
Life will stay full of wonder and fun
With your hyperactive grandson
Retiring then is no mistake
We'll see you oft, you'll need each
break.*

Commentary: This poem was written for the retirement party we gave at our home for Sue Dym. At the time Bernice was already having trouble from the Administration, whose job was to get rid of the high paid teachers. The Superintendent was an Italian who never hired a Jew except for a Romanian who had an Italian sounding name which ended in a vowel. You can sense my hostility in this poem.

A Diamond Ring

10 October 2011

*This party's for Sue, but that being said.
I'd like to point out it's really for Ed.
Though Sue is entrancing as she holds Court.
She secretly leans on Ed for support.
Think of the strength of character it takes
To have Ed's high wit yet slam on the brakes
And send Sue forward so that she will shine
While Ed could also deliver the line.
Now Sue is leaving us for her Daughter
Ed broke up his life here to support her.
Not a peep of complaint came from his mouth
As he looked into the deep and dark South
Remember always that when they take wing
Sue is the Diamond but Ed is the Ring.*

Islam

some time in 2011

*Put the women in their place
Never let them show their face
They earn death if they should fail
To keep entombed in their veil
Each man full bearded and proud
Leads his woman in her shroud
Puffed up mindless as a pigeon
Through the tomb of that religion.*

Commentary: No need.

Shopping Sibling Rivalry

Early 2012

*Let's go and shop to spend the day
Just like we used to do at play
It should be fun, what do you say?*

*I'm not so sure said Sibling two
You're rich and I can't spend like you.
We'll meet right here when we are through*

*But when they came out from the store
One sibling found that he'd paid more
So wasn't happy as before*

*He said I think it's only fair
Since I paid more for the same pair
We split the difference and share*

*Oh no, oh no, said sibling one
You went your way, to have some fun
And so the deal we had was done.*

*So then they did what siblings do
A fight began as if on cue
And each was scarred both black and blue*

*For siblings who had once been tight
It was indeed a monstrous fight
They couldn't sleep at all that night*

Commentary: This is the first poem of 2012. I forget whatever the inspiration may have been

Gloves

08 September 2012

*I won't write about gloves; I'm not a glover
I must write about love, for I'm a lover
A person who would much rather un-cover*

*Just as a tight collar muffles a singer
A glove disables the sensitive finger
From knowing how to touch and where to linger*

*So if the naked truth will ever be told
Only exposed hands can lead a life that's bold
And produce enough warmth to subdue the cold*

Commentary: In the summer of 2012 I joined a Memoir Writing Class in the Senior Center of San Mateo. I loved the course and stayed in it until we left San Mateo, seven years later. This was written in response to an assigned prompt.

Tharp's Story Tree

19-20 Sept 2012

*Once I told my young kids a true story
That involved a special Sequoia tree.
Long ago lived a gold miner named Tharp
Who switched to herding sheep for he was sharp
Each spring he led the flock on a sally
Uphill from the Imperial Valley
Because forage in the meadows was free
And so too was rent - in a fallen tree
This Sequoia became his noble den
In it John Muir took up a golden pen
And by the light of glowing candle wax
Wrote to save the sacred groves from the ax*

*This story about Hale Tharp and his tree
Lodged in my kids' infinite memory
Mixed with so many a tale and fable
That a genii might not have been able
Save by an extraordinary act
To distinguish the fiction from the fact*

*Then some time later we drove to L.A.
For a sabbatical we came to stay
Before we could move and start paying rent
A week somewhere else had to be spent
So we drove out of LA on a lark
That there might be space in Sequoia Park
The odds were against us - not a good plight
But one cabin came vacant just at night.*

*The next morning after our breakfast feast
I told my kids what they liked to hear least
About all the trails that went by the trees
But to them it sounded like a disease
My kids suspected we'd mapped a long hike
It was the one thing they most didn't like.
"Oh, Evan's too tired and I'm too weak"*

*Said Elise. "But we will play hide and seek
For that is the thing we came here to do
Go run on ahead and we will find you.
Try and hide from us and we will follow
Rooting you out of each tree that's hollow"
Off they went without a whisper of strife
For what was the longest hike of their life.
The joy in their eyes and their energy
Was unbounded as they hid in each tree*

*Hurry up they said, you're going too slow
Till the trees ran out at Crescent Meadow
Where Tharp's cabin stared them right in the face
My children couldn't believe that that place
Was just as I told them where the log lies
That sheltered old Tharp in front of their eyes*

*I gave my kids something special that day
I taught them you can love to learn at play
But the point that is closer to the mark
Was that on that day in Sequoia Park
Walking 'mongst giants with my kids and wife
Was one of the greatest days of my life.*

Commentary: This is based on the time we came to Sequoia Park in September 1985 at the beginning of my sabbatical year at UCLA. We got nervous several times when we couldn't find the kids as they hid in the hollowed out Sequoias. I have always loved that park and the story of Hale Tharp, which I read about as a kid long, long before I ever got to Sequoia (for the first time in 1966).

When I sent a copy of the poem to my friend, Bob Salzman, he responded with this ingenious series of puns so I log his response here.

My Dear Stan, you have a gift! This is an incredible piece. You should submit it to the Muir Society for publication.

Now: I was really felled by your use of poetry, I wood say. You certainly had the right aspect. It was deciduously a great piece. It will leaf everyone who reads it in a state of awe, and will insist that you branch out into areas other than science and photographic art. A writer of your timber is hard to find.

Boom and Bust

06-08 October 2012, last two lines added 20 December 2012

*This is a story of how economics
Gets us in a fix.
The first generation built a pyramid
They loved what they did.
The second noted with alarm and regret
It was wracked with debt.
The third gazed up and asked with stupefied fear
How did this get here?
Some later generation will try again
To start the refrain
Of cycles that oscillate from boom to bust
From ashes to dust
So forget the debt - Whenever we create
Debts evaporate.*

Commentary: I wrote this to affirm that within extremely large limits, National Debt doesn't matter. What does is enthusiasm, activity, and faith that all is OK.

Animal Quiz Rhymes

09 October 2012

<i>What animal can climb a tree?</i>	<i>A bee!</i>
<i>What animal can't?</i>	<i>An ant!</i>
<i>What animal makes you laugh?</i>	<i>A giraffe!</i>
<i>What animal doesn't need a plane?</i>	<i>A crane!</i>
<i>What animal rides in a boat?</i>	<i>A goat!</i>
<i>What animal lives under rocks?</i>	<i>A fox!</i>
<i>What animal likes to sleep?</i>	<i>A sheep!</i>
<i>What animal eats jam?</i>	<i>A lamb!</i>
<i>What animal is fat?</i>	<i>A cat!</i>
<i>What animal is big?</i>	<i>A pig!</i>
<i>What animal is narrow?</i>	<i>A sparrow!</i>
<i>What animal is wider?</i>	<i>A spider!</i>
<i>What animal is dark?</i>	<i>A shark!</i>
<i>What animal is sore?</i>	<i>A boar!</i>
<i>What animal is here?</i>	<i>A deer!</i>
<i>What animal is there?</i>	<i>A hare!</i>
<i>What animal is smart?</i>	<i>A hart!</i>
<i>What animal has no class?</i>	<i>An ass! A bass!</i>
<i>What animal has no culture?</i>	<i>A vulture!</i>
<i>What animal is in the sky?</i>	<i>A fly!</i>
<i>What animal eats with a fork?</i>	<i>A stork!</i>
<i>What animal eats with a spoon?</i>	<i>A loon!</i>
<i>What animal is hollow?</i>	<i>A swallow!</i>
<i>What animal has a bad habit?</i>	<i>A rabbit!</i>
<i>What animal is slow?</i>	<i>A crow!</i>
<i>What animal is a darling?</i>	<i>A starling!</i>
<i>What animal leads the herd?</i>	<i>A bird!</i>
<i>What animal produces fuel?</i>	<i>A mule!</i>
<i>What animal is drunk?</i>	<i>A skunk!</i>
<i>What animal is full?</i>	<i>A bull!</i>
<i>What animal drinks beer?</i>	<i>A steer!</i>
<i>What animal fought us?</i>	<i>A tortoise!</i>
<i>What animal is cute in his suit?</i>	<i>A newt!</i>
<i>What animal sings out of tune?</i>	<i>A raccoon! A baboon!</i>
<i>What animal lives in a hole?</i>	<i>A mole!</i>
<i>What animal is squashed in the road?</i>	<i>A toad!</i>

<i>What animal is hotter?</i>	<i>An otter!</i>
<i>What animal makes you ache?</i>	<i>A snake!</i>
<i>What animal likes a carrot?</i>	<i>A parrot!</i>
<i>What animal likes a treat?</i>	<i>A parakeet!</i>
<i>What animal makes the best waiter?</i>	<i>An alligator!</i>
<i>What animal reads the newspaper?</i>	<i>A tapir!</i>
<i>What animal finds fingers to grab?</i>	<i>A crab!</i>

Commentary: The inspiration was a trip to the San Mateo, CA Exploratorium at Coyote Point with granddaughter, Alexia

The Poet Laureate

24 October 2012

*I have to tell you a gruesome story
About an envious girl named Laurie
And a sweeter girl you'd much rather meet
Who owned a bigger house across the street.
All the neighborhood fell in love with Kate
She was pretty and her poems were great.
The difference between them was day and night,
Laurie was ugly and she couldn't write.
While Kate won all laurels on the town stage
Laurie swore revenge with a grisly rage.
But as good as Kate was in her town's eyes
She never did win a National Prize.
So when Laurie friccasseed tender Kate,
Kate was at last the Poet Laurie ate.*

Commentary: I got this idea on the walk back from the Memoir Writing Class. As I thought about the Prompt – which sport that I was poor at to write about I thought of golf. This sport requires strength, dexterity, accuracy, and patience - four qualities I lack. My wife's youngest brother, Barry, who was a scratch golfer, took me out one day. As I thought of whether this was good to write about I recalled the poem I wrote for him when he turned 16. Suddenly there came into my mind that Poet Laureate (Laurie Ate), is a pun.

Now I had my subject, or at least the subject for an essay. At first, I thought the lines, "at last it was his fate to be the poet Laurie ate", should conclude a story involving a pretty girl turned monster by a sadistic neighbor who fed the girl her own pets after killing and cooking them. But this story would have to be too long, so what about a poem instead of a story? Many lines in the poem should rhyme with ate - hence Kate. This removed the man and replaced her with another woman. Then, Laurie rhymed with story so that was a good start, but it eased the restriction that every line rhyme with ate. I came home and wrote the poem before dinner, and polished it by the next morning. My son, Evan, who writes beautiful poetry whenever he tries, suggested improvements, which I made on Monday 29 October. Of course, another inspiration for the poem is Catherine, our beautiful, sweet, inspirational memoir writing teacher, who used her fertile imagination to write a real ghoulish story. As I write this it suddenly occurred to me that Kate is a nickname for Catherine. Now, where will that lead us?

A Cruise

20 December, 2012

*Should you embark on a cruise?
It's a chance you can't refuse.
What to do? You're free to choose.
Go have fun you've paid your dues
You'll only win, never lose.
Wash away your land based blues
With tons of food, tanks of booze.
Pig out at the barbeques.
Take time to play, time to snooze.
Walk and swim without your shoes
Lean back and enjoy the views
Go for days without the news
And if you get the right cues
Make your secret rendezvous!*

Commentary: Obviously inspired by a cruise, which we took to Curacao and Aruba.

Death of Snoopy

12 March 2013

*There was a tiny dog, Snoopy
Who made a gigantic poopy
And when he got very sleepy.
He drowned in pools of his pee pee.*

Commentary: Written when Alexia just entered the anal stage. I told her of a square man with a square head, square eyes, square ears, square hair, square nose, square mouth, square teeth and square doo doo's. That made her laugh. She asked for more. "Tell it again." So I composed this poem, which she also liked and wanted me to repeat. Lord help me if she repeats it in the wrong place and at the wrong time.

Mushrooming Mushrooms

13, 17 March 2013

*The place that they're normally found
Is in deep shade down on the ground
Where maybe you'll gather a pound.*

*If mushrooms are tricky to find
They're much trickier on your mind.
Although they will help you unwind.*

*Some mushrooms you may well meet
Are a delicacy, a treat
While others you'd better not eat.*

*Be savvy, do not be a fool
For quickly you'll find it's not cool
To eat by mistake a toadstool.*

*In minutes you'll see that you will
Begin to feel extrem'ly ill
Your friends will then watch mushrooms kill*

*Poison mushrooms kill one by one
It's faster to take a hand gun
As so many thousands have done
The Second Amendment is fun!*

*We've saved the best for dessert
I assure you it will not hurt
But you will be turned back to dirt*

*The mushroom that wins the grand prize
Is one that outgrows its disguise.
To tower up into the skies
And that is when everyone dies.*

Which mushroom can tower so proud?

*Which mushroom is war's greatest shroud?
Why, the nuclear mushroom cloud.*

Commentary: Some of the ladies in the Memoir class complimented my skill at poetry. So with the theme being mushrooms (which I don't like and didn't want to write about) I went to town. Before the compliment I had thought of the mushroom cloud so I did weave it in at the end. In fact, I aimed for it. I also wanted to avoid staid rhymes such as a fungus among us. And I kept the word, mushroom away from the end of a line even though doom and gloom rhyme with it.

Serenade

10, 23-24 July 2013, 29 Sept 2020

*Four billion plus years ago an event
Clumped Earth in violent self-bombardment.
Eons later an inanimate brew
Sparked to Life as something totally new.
How did life arise? We still cannot tell
How DNA formed nor a single cell.
More than one billion years would rise and fall
Before that cell could build itself a wall.
Two billion years more of time's slothful loop
Was needed to form a functional group.
Then some forms emerged from the shallow seas
To populate land and cloak it in trees.
Sleuthing each wonder and tracing each course
Leaves us gaping in wonder at the source.
Now we pass by countless epochs unseen
To peer into Franz Schubert's hut in Wien
To wonder anew how from noise was made
Life's Beauteous, urgent call - Serenade.*

I have long been stupefied by how creations such as come from the gleaming accuracy of Jan van Eyck' vision, the monumental clarity of Isaac Newton's mind, and the melodic fertility of Franz Schubert's soul could have arisen as if out of chaos. The immediate inspiration for this poem was hearing some pianists performance of Schubert's *Serenade* on YouTube, a piece I have played for years on the piano without understanding. It never sounded like a serenade to me, just a beautiful piece. But after the melody is repeated, there is a sudden transition to a section I never understood until I heard this pianist's rendition. It expresses an intensely urgent, passionate call that I had completely missed all the years I have known it. Beauty is not enough to attract the lover. Urgency and passion must accompany it to create life anew. The poem followed.

Anthony Wiener

23-24 July 2013

*The press is getting meaner
Cries poor Anthony Wiener.
I favor no one sect
For all I stand erect.
I hope you've been impressed
With what's below my chest.
I'm certain that it shows
When I omit my clothes.
But through this long campaign
I promise to refrain
From acting as a stranger
Disguised as Carlos Danger
Till I'm reborn top player
The moment that I'm Mayor.*

Commentary: Wiener's new sexual problems are back in the news and he announces he is born pure and chaste yet again. So this satire just came to me quickly.

Nancy's Poor Cats

05 September 2013, 01 October 2013

*When springtime came to Strathmore Road
I found the subject for this ode.
Nancy and Wendy often had spats
She then would visit us with her two cats.
I liked them one notch less than rats.
But their actions quickly changed my mood
It was time to form a feline brood
The male was yearning to penetrate
But he was going to have to wait
The female focused only on food
And did not want to be pursued
She did all she could to avoid
The ardent male. She bit, she clawed
She hissed, she spit; was she annoyed!
No matter his whole frame was taut
His finest efforts summed to naught.
A few days later the male looked bored
The female's wiles he simply ignored.
Her body quivered with reproductive fire
She couldn't have arched her back half higher
She traversed the room in high gear reverse
Trying to back right into his face
Her timing could not have been any worse
He yawned and sought out some safer place
He clearly did not want the female there
In the end her unfilled womb stayed bare
Wendy moved out, ending those spats
The new roommate was allergic, so goodbye, cats
Nature and nurture are seldom fair.*

Commentary: Nancy Smith and I remained friends for years. This incident actually occurred and the mismatched timing of the cats gave me a good laugh and perhaps a lesson in life. But a few days after I conceived and wrote this poem I realized that the memory which had inspired it had bubbled up as a result of my diminishing amorous powers and desires. Aging brings peace. Give me back my anguished turmoil.

Breaking Dishes

08 October 2013

*I do not fret about breaking a dish
Even though it's not my wish
I do not mourn over cracking a plate
Even though I don't feel great.
Dad went nuts if his car got a dent
To me it was a non event.
I found real early that things do break
So breakage never kept me awake
But I do sing a quite different song
When things as they do tend to go wrong.
I have no patience for fixing the house.
Despite the ardent wish of my spouse.
For no matter what I've try to fix
It seems I always lacked the tricks
A little more patience and something might work
Instead I rush and fail and feel like a jerk.
I'm sure this would bother me more if I cared
But when I write poems my soul is repaired.*

Commentary: I couldn't think of anything regarding breaking dishes. Then it occurred to me that I get frustrated when I try to fix things. I do not like working around the house. Everything takes patience and I don't have the patience. I also do not like such practical work. Gardening is the same - it is good in concept but takes much time. So I remain an incompetent in these matters.

How did the poem come about? I already wrote an excessively long essay about the trip to Africa and didn't want to write another long essay. I wanted something short. Then the first lines of the poem came to me and a poem it was to be. The idea for the last lines came to me at the end. I wanted to give the poem a positive spin. My life has not been worthless - I have done many good things that I do enjoy. Writing is one of the things that I enjoy and it redeems me. So I sputtered around until the last two lines rhymed. I could do it better, I suppose, (with a bit more patience) but I made my point.

Prince XX

09 November 2013

*I'm going to act like Abraham Lincoln
Write a letter 'bout what I've been thinkin'.
But dare not ever send it through the mail
Because its harsh message is doomed to fail.
For if that letter would ever be sent
He would learn nothing, he'd only resent.
XX, we know you're incredibly bright
But you're also a thankless parasite.
To lift a helping finger makes you wince
You've spent your whole life as if you're a prince.
Your parents bear most of the early blame
Your dad's a control freak, your mother's lame.
He works ceaselessly to stay in control
While she and your siblings live on the dole.
You wanted to come to us as a guest
Play while we work and expect to be blessed.
That might be fine if you came for a day
A fortnight like that is too long a stay.
I hastened the day you'd have to depart
I'm glad that it gave you a change of heart.
So for this vacation you took a pass
Now solve your problem, get off your fat ass.*

Commentary: This is too close to home so I will keep XX anonymous. But the poem applies to lazy freeloaders. Humans, like many animals, are compelled for reasons of survival to work and live in groups. This has engendered in most of us a complex nature that includes cooperation and sympathy, yet dislike of freeloaders. But given the statistical variations always present in nature, there is an advantage for a small percentage of people to be freeloaders or scoundrels, and to use any device they can to maintain their status and behavior. They will therefore capitalize on the innate sympathy of most others. The helpers feel guilty if they withhold anything from the rascals because of the inner conflict between their sympathy and their resentment at being taken advantage of.

We humans are also inquisitive, acquisitive and competitive. Once we have accumulated anything, it is vulnerable, not only to scoundrels, but to all, for we are opportunistic. The owner's protective instincts are aroused, and the more prominent the possessions, the greater that instinct. Hence, greed grows with wealth.

This tendency is a main root of Buddhism as I understand it. Anything you possess or enjoy becomes a potential danger and a trap. In the extreme, following Gandhi, you give up not only your possessions, but pleasures, including sex, which Gandhi gave up with admitted difficulty at 37 (though apparently only with his wife). I have always greatly admired Gandhi's public strength of character and integrity; never would I have wanted to be him. No coincidence that at the time I wrote my 'salacious' story (about an Indian girl) I was reading Gandhi's Memoirs!

Wealth also encourages freeloaders and scoundrels. The accumulations of society are seen to be at risk. To keep non-producers quiet a dole is always created. And once welfare is institutionalized it strengthens both the resentments and the self righteousness of both givers and takers. After a long enough time in protected environments, birds lose the ability of flight.

Do I Like Open Mike?

Stanley David Gedzelman

21-22, 26 November, 2013

*I came to Open Mike to find a friend.
But offer very little from my end.
At each encounter I find I am shy;
If you look at me I avert my eye.
My body language is loud and is clear,
"I am not int'rested in you, my dear."
What a dead end way to seek a soul mate.
You can bet no one thinks that I'm so great.
Bonding takes time when people are sincere
But I am not the sole egotist here.
Many wait their turn to read in suspense.
Listening for them is merely pretense
The moment that they stand up on the stage
Is the start of a geologic age
Their eyes flash with joy at writings so dull
And aimless as a ship without a hull
They think their inflated inflection warps
Vivacity and brilliance from a corpse.
Over 20 minutes some stand and drone
As I grit my teeth with a silent groan
One jabbers bout the roars of bees and birds
Week after week I must suffer her words
Am I the only one who suffers so?
I look around and most faces say, "No!"
Yet no matter that everyone is bored
When she is finished they stand and applaud.
Another deafens us with sound effects.
Asberger's Syndrome adds to his defects.
Then come poems without rhyme or meter.
We clap each time to silence the reader.
To say I don't like them makes me seem kind.
If I hear another I'll lose my mind.
Poems by a writing coach? - How they pall.
Her ego is matched by her matchless gall.
Some spill seas of words with thoughts so inane.*

*That most should be sunk in the bounding main.
True, a few good phrases manage to float.
While as writers it's clear they've missed the boat.
Certainly, all who come to read are bright
But there's little merit in what most write.
With all my complaints I too come to read
To feel I am heard is also my need
Perhaps my poems and stories are worse
But I have the wisdom to keep them terse.
Oh my, how I've set my viciousness free.
Will I make everyone an enemy?
Wait! Someone's reading a riveting tale.
Is it a potential friend I could hail?
Bonding requires enough time to knit.
Reading this poem would surely kill it!
I never did read this at open mike
But neither did I find a friend to like.*

Commentary: This was inspired (if that is the word) by suffering through the Open Mic session of the California Writer's Club in which two readers droned on for over 15 minutes apiece and a team of two dueling poets recited for over 20 minutes. The story I liked best lasted exactly 5 minutes. Of the 12 readings, I liked 4 and noted scattered good lines and ideas in a few others. Perhaps that is a pretty good percentage. One guy, absent this time greatly impressed me with his sound effects the first time, but in subsequent sessions read pretty much the same superhero stuff with pretty much the same sound effects at every opportunity. I never found a friend at the CWC nor did anyone find me as a friend.

Eric's Train

18 October 2015

*I walk on the road by the side of the train
As it roars past I thrill at its power.
I just hate its whistle's piercing refrain
That rattles me no matter the hour.*

*Though gates and bells should surely warn
Where train and roads intersect.
It's long been the law to blast its horn
To double the chance to protect.*

*To further safety, fences were built
That cluttered a view once clear.
Those fences have not stopped one drop being spilt
The train's toll remains far too dear.*

*For if you want to do yourself harm
You need not walk or bike very far.
Stand calm on the platform; cause no alarm.
Then jump at the express train's first car.*

*Eighteen people lost their lives that way
By July this year on the track.
It doesn't matter how much we might pray
From such a small leap there is no way back.*

*Our nephew came out one year ago
With high hopes but then life turned mean.
We saw his decline but had no way to know
That he would be number nineteen.*

*Eric was a sweet and brilliant youth
But somehow he disguised
What I plainly should have seen as truth
That he was paralyzed.*

He couldn't work or find a friend

*He must have suffered great pain.
We know the harsh voices he heard in the end
Drove him to his last ride on that train.*

*Now he's at peace and we're left behind
To suffer both guilt and remorse.
We loved Eric dearly but all he could find
Was his life was bereft of recourse.*

*I know that psychosis is a disease
But I still feel I did so much wrong.
Time will allow my deep sorrows to ease
But some pain will last all my life long.*

*Oh, Eric how could you have done yourself in
When life has such great joys to give?
Why couldn't you hear through the train whistle's din
What it screams to each of us – live!*

Postscript

*Rooting our demons within when we're lost
Feels like scaling a bridge without guard rails.
So in terror we flee to denial.
But that lowly road has such a steep cost
It puts you at risk that your whole life fails.
I now understand Kafka's Trial.*

Commentary: In retrospect, I felt like I was always one step behind when it came to helping Eric. Add ambivalence and that I felt he was on my watch and my mourning was magnified. I cannot begin to describe all my feelings. The “what if’s” and the regrets are endless. The sorrow slowly ebbs from a high tide. But I did conclude that if someone wants to end their life, you can watch them for 23 hours and 59 minutes each day and in the minute you turn away they will do what they want. So the responsibility is theirs.

Duality

Stanley David Gedzelman

09 July 2016

I came to swim but on a whim
In a perfect pool of silent water
I dropped as bait permanganate
In order to see what its catch would be.

The tiny grain slashed a purple stain
That paled to pink as it drank its drink.
Yet stood nearly still as it always will
Diffusing in place like wavering lace.

But each drip will drive a ripple
Which, as it races, always traces
A spectral caustic cross the floor.
To prop the clear but wavy water.

And so it is with poetry.
In olden days it used to be
Voyages crossing real oceans
Accompanied by emotions.

Now the sea is imagery
The voyage in the mind
The port the soul, elusive goal
Impossible to find.

Commentary: This poem won the grand prize for poetry at the 2018 San Mateo Fair. It compares the wave-particle duality of nature to the action-emotion duality presented in literature, pointing out how literature has evolved to give primacy to the emotions. It was directly inspired by the readings in the Short Story Class I have been taking at OLLI San Francisco. My thanks to instructor Daniel Herman (and my interesting classmates), who has made the course fascinating, perhaps particularly because I do not like several of the stories. Finally, my thoughts were brought back to poetry by listening to one lady's reading of her sunrise-sunset poems in Memoir Writing Class.

Youthful Trio

27 August, 03 Sept 2016

*Idealism, Passion, Ambition.
It's been too short a run.
Farewell my youthful trio.
Why do you flee? - Oh!
Who chased you? Was it you,
wisdom?
Why did I ask you to come.
Go away! I still want to play.
What have you ever done...
For me or for anyone?
Am I calmer? Having more fun?
You well know it's not so.
Am I more confident?
Not a chance, I'm only bent.
You have not eased my fears.
Or dried one of my tears.
You just broke illusion's spell.
So, wisdom, go straight to hell!
It's true - my trio drove me awry
Idealism's phantom shone on high*

*Enticing wingless me to fly
And at every single leap I tried
Passion and its surging tide
Swirled me oh so far aside
While ambition yanked another
way
Masquerading night as day
My trio twisted me through the
dark
Diverting me from each true
mark.
Yet how they intoxicated me
Baiting with hopeful misery.
Now I yearn for a second chance.
But time's sole setting is advance.
So clearly I see I failed to pursue
The only thing in life that's true
The thing you must hold high
above.
The courage to recognize love.*

Commentary: This is just one more poem about the decline of youthful emotions and drives that make life so impulsive, so explosive, so exquisite, so difficult, and so necessary.

Taker's Ploy

14 January 2017 (Revised 02 April 2017)

*Please loan me money to pay for the rent.
I had some before but now it's been spent.
To save up enough has long been my goal
But I have passions I cannot control.
Why don't you trust me? I know you keep track.
I promise some day I will pay you back.
Think I'm a taker? I say you don't care.
If I were richer, I surely would share.
If I had money I'd loan you, I would.
I'm a good person; I'm basically good.
You just are selfish. It's quite plain to see.
What good is your wealth? You'll die just like me.
Go on, begrudge me! What tidbits you'll save...
When they evict me, I'll spit on your grave.*

Commentary: This has a personal aspect I will not reveal. It has taken me decades to learn that there are genetic scoundrels who are unrepentant and will prey on the guilt of any drone they can fix on. This spiteful, but all too true poem is my revenge.

Elegy for Ed

20-21 July 2017

*Each morn after the men had left for the day
To face the clamor of the city's towers
The lady teachers wended their joyous way
To grace Woodcliff Lake School like gorgeous flowers.*

*It was kinder then some twenty years ago
Oh how those ladies worked as a well-knit team
Intimate friends they were and they made it show
For each child's face with happy eyes would gleam*

*And when at last arrived the too brief weekends
The teachers oft got together to party
They brought their men and we too became good friends
Two were Ed and Homer, both hale and hearty*

*The school changed, the camaraderie undone
Some teachers moved and others were retired
Still the friendships endured; and still we had fun!
I treasure all those times; they were inspired.*

*But time whittled at us; that's its job and curse
One by one we left to follow family
More time marched on; it has no gear for reverse
Parties morphed to emails, calls, or memory*

*When our turn came we stopped to see Sue and Ed
I had thought he would hate North Carolina
But there, by his pond with a smile he said
At last I'm a king; I never felt finer.*

*There are moments in life you always recall
Standing beside Ed was one of those for me
For that precious moment made Ed immortal
So when I picture Ed that is what I see.*

Commentary: I took a photo showing smiling Ed pointing proudly toward the pond behind his home in North Carolina. That set the tone for the poem. I was sorry to lose him; we had good times together. At about that time, we also lost another friend, Homer Purcell who went to sleep and didn't wake up.

The Mirror

Stanley David Gedzelman

07 Oct 2017

*I see a handsome youth when I look in the glass,
A man who stands for truth, who always acts high class.
A man whose brilliant mind, no problem e'er could daunt.
A man robust and kind, whom all the ladies want.*

*I could go on to claim I see a deep, pure soul.
But no more of this game, for the truth is my goal.
So I sadly confess, I've told nothing but lies.
What I see is a mess, especially my eyes.*

*My shape's held up well for many a long year.
My gut has a small swell from chocolate and beer
Although that's not so bad 'cause if I cared enough
I'd be able and glad to forego that great stuff.*

*The first thing I do mind, which still gives me a scare
Is that I cannot find what happened to my hair.
My optimism fled, my daydreams turned unreal
It really screwed my head, I lost my sex appeal.*

*My skin seen from afar seems like a lake becalmed.
The closer that you are makes you swear it's been bombed.
Its craters so blotchy, its ridges, scars and glens
I see all too plainly once I put in my lens.*

*And last, the concave glass heartlessly magnifies
The wrinkles that harass my tired, bloodshot eyes.
They say, you're old, you're old, no matter what you try
It need not be foretold, that you will surely die.*

Commentary: This poem followed a writing prompt in Memoirs Plus Class. Several women wrote about their wrinkles. So it freed me to be comically negative about my own decline or decay.

Ma, He Told Such Lies to Me

23 January 2018

Sung to the tune of Ma, He's Making Eyes at Me

*Ma, he told such lies to me
Now look at the size of me*

*I let him go somewhat too far
Now I cannot fit beside him in the ca-ar*

*Ma, my man is on the run
Since dad got his gun*

*All it took was one small po-oke
Now I know it was no jo-oke
Ma, my water broke.*

Commentary: Bernice and I joined the Music Pals, a chorus at our Senior Living Community in Boynton Beach, Florida. We were accepted despite all our extraordinary vocal limitations – they need warm bodies. Before COVID struck we gave live performances at Senior Centers and sang mostly songs from no later than the 1950's and most from the 30's or before. This was one of the songs I satirized.

Sex

16 August 2018

*Sex should be simple but it's been made plain
We must treat it as sacred, then refrain
Although we all feel like making the rounds
Sex is placed out of sight and out of bounds
So tell me now, what are the young to do?
When they are strictly forbidden to screw.
With strong drives the only way to feel great
Alone - You guessed it - is to masturbate
With that, religion puts you in a bind
They tell you doing that will make you blind
Restriction lifts passion to fever pitch
And once there is the will there is the way
Nothing then can stop a roll in the hay
Which too often leads to a nasty itch
So, oft after feeling ethereal
We discover sex is venereal.*

Commentary: This deals with the conflict between the sacred and the profane. Too often we are told to distinguish love from sexual passion, invariably disparaging and attempting to restrict sex, which is precisely the force that continues life.

Buy a Lull (A Saudi Lullaby)

17 October 2018

Sung to the tune of Lullaby and Good Night

How dare he

Disagree

So dismember Khashoggi

Then we lied

And denied

Cause we know Trump's on our side (less political version: Cause the world is on our side)

Now, relax

Face the facts

It won't come to a boil

They'll complain

Then abstain

Cause the world wants our oil.

Commentary: Say what you want to get what you want. Truth is a luxury.

Country Love

Stanley David Gedzelman

01 June 2019

*Well I live up in the country
And I took meself a wife.
She was my prettiest sister.
To be only mine for life
But she's gone, oh how I miss her
Because she had the frontry
To be lovin' with another
My handsome younger brother
Next she lay down with our big son
And that's when I got my gun
I shot him in back of the head
One time and poof both were dead.
Now even sad men need some fun
Though I shouldn't have oughta
I lay with my pretty daughter.
Which led to further slaughter.
But how can you ever be free
Livin' up here in the country
If you can't love your family?*

Commentary: I hate most Country and Brain-Dead Music so much that I decided to try my hand at it. What do you think? Don't dare accuse me of stereotyping.

Modern Nursery Rhymes

07-09 Sept 2019

Sung to Baa-Baa Black Sheep.

Iphone, Iphone

Have you loaded apps?

Yes sir three with no mishaps

One for my cash card

One for my shrink

One for the ritalin

That lets me think.

Iphone, Iphone

Have you loaded apps?

Yes sir three with no mishaps

Sung to Mary had a Little Lamb.

*Mary had a limousine, limousine,
limousine.*

Mary had a limousine

Its chauffeur served her well

And everywhere that Mary went,

Mary went, Mary went

Everywhere that Mary went.

She gave her chauffeur hell.

Sung to Old MacDonald.

New CE-O ran a firm

IP IPO

And for the firm he chose a Board

That would not say no.

*With some leverage here, and
some options there*

Here a put, there a call

Everywhere a short sale

Rich CE-O broke the firm

'Cause he stole the dough

Sung to Little Bo Peep.

Little Go Run

Got out her gun

*And mowed down the kids in the
school yard.*

Now that they're dead

The NRA said

Guns don't kill kids, only kids do.

Commentary: The move from the country farms since the time most nursery rhymes were written means that today's urban, much richer, and entitled kids know nothing about farm animals. We therefore must update the content and messages of the nursery rhymes so that today's kids can understand them. The simple melodies of the old nursery rhymes remain beautiful and therefore we will keep them.

One serious flaw of many of the classical nursery rhymes is the ridiculous names of the children that were chosen solely to rhyme. Thus Miss Muffet was chosen to rhyme with tuffet, Bo Peep with sheep, and Mother Hubbard with cupboard, to name but three. So, with new verses, it is natural to choose new ridiculous names.

War

01 December 2019

*The old men who sat on cushy benches
Sent the young men out to muddy trenches
If any of those boys had half a brain
They would never have gone out in the rain
Of bullets that were sure to soak them through
And through in their own blood as bullets do
But such is the lure of unseen borders
That to our deaths we will follow orders
So long as we fail to see that others
Are not our enemies but our brothers
Some day perhaps we'll see beyond our clan
Right now only very few of us can
Most of us are programmed deep in our core
To itch for conflict and clamor for war
It's not my nature - it's not who I am
The lion's not made to lie with the lamb
Because many have the will to power
Peace will always be a fragile flower*

Commentary: If the young refused to go to war there would be no war. That is an ancient idea but one that is usually unworkable.