

A Matter of Breath



Poems of 2003 - 2007

by Alan Harris

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Heaven is hugging us.

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Sanctuary Cove Tucson, Arizona

Here is a chapel
simple enough
to welcome all creeds,
all vegetation,
all birds,
all humans.

People of vision built it up
out of stone to serve souls
upon this quiet foothill
near Safford Peak.

Visitors come for prayer
or meditation or escape
or inner alignment
and enter into its peace.

Not a myth, this place—
mortared local stone,
cactus needles fully sharp,
red earth of ancient lava.

When outer living has led
to a thirst for contemplation,
a path leads you to the door.

Walk in. Adjust your eyes.
Choose a bench for sitting.
Beliefs fade into Silence
opening into Mystery
as doves out on the roof
are cooing a knowing
that you lost long ago.

Wanting

I didn't want to have to want
but I had to want not to hurt
so I wanted what I felt was best
but everyone else wanted it too
and there wasn't enough of it
so conflicts and hurt prevailed
even though we wanted peace.

Now what I really seem to want
is not to have to want at all
but if I can always never want
will that be what I'll always want?

Weather Forecast

Plan on being
warmer tomorrow
with a 60 percent
chance of light
karma mixed
with opportunity.

No storms
are in sight
until Friday
when a wave
of retribution
sweeps in
from the West
to spread doubts
and briefly intense
doomshowers.

Your historical high
for this date
has been forgotten
and let's not even
think about your low.

Tune in tomorrow,
way in,
and remember,
if you don't have
any weather,
you are somewhere
else.

Now, Sweet Now

When quiet has its way,
a subtle glow may grow
inside the heart's heart.

One's furnishings reflect
a different cast of light
when silence fills the room.

Consonance with core
allows a laying down
of petty weekday will.

All cells become as servants
to a Master higher than
the calls of sense and self.

True, jostlings and lacks
and irritating chores
await the coming down.

Dark evil, multiform,
may offer up its dirt,
and errors their regret,

but in this now, sweet now,
a subtle glow is growing
inside the heart's heart.

Permissions

From whom does your life
have its license to live?
Not from Rome or Scriptures
or fine-robed Interpreters—

not from parent or teacher,
policeman or mayor.
Your frame can be governed
but your heart heeds the One

as butterflies do
aloft in a breeze
over leaf and flower
in tune with The Will.

Enclosed please find
within you a church
never built, yet nearer
than one breath away.

Seeking until Found

There is a footless path,
a carless road,
a planeless flight
to a placeless mountain
within.

When focused on our outer joys
we seek after things that weigh or thrill,
we dignify the use of force,
we laud coarse lucre with our hopes.
Seeking without, we remain without.

If we but listen quietly
for the call to an inner mountain state,
we find that our souls are known and loved
by a subtle shepherd grooming us
to serve and build, to sow and reap.

Knowing our knownness,
we may find our foundness.

Ignorance Implicit

The flowers bloom.
The wind blows.

The president's soldiers torture
their prisoners before cameras.

The flowers bloom.
The wind blows.

Spam infests the world's e-mailboxes.

The flowers bloom.
The wind blows.

US lawyers advise that torturing is legal
as long as you mean well.

The flowers bloom.
The wind blows.

The Internet hosts vicious viruses
created by the brilliant ignorant.

The flowers bloom.
The wind blows.

Partisan hatred pours out of talk shows
and animates political seekings.

The flowers bloom.
The wind blows.

Two Windows

Please
don't be
fooled by
what you
think you
see through
that window.

Nothing is there.
What to see
is inside
the seen.

Out there
is a parade
of decay
and illusion.

Inside, where
seeing is whole,
waits a beauty
you long ago knew
in the rolling
of your lives.

Try the window
within.

Blissful Baby

New in a pink body
now plied with milk,
you sleep somewhere
beyond vulnerability.

Where do you go?
What are you seeing?
Weary parents envy
your guarded nirvana.

Plowhorse

My horse and I are brothers,
and the morning sun knows why.

Within my horse resides
a soul, I'm pretty sure—
more wisdom than just to strain
and turn brown fields to black.

I'd guess this horse was human
in ages before the Ice,
but now for some dim reason
is sentenced to the plow.

Service, a horse's essence,
had best be, too, my own
as we pull such plows as matter
into ages still to come.

My horse and I are brothers
and the morning sun knows why.

Dove Missile

This afternoon in a chapel
in the desert mountains
northwest of Tucson
I was standing beside
a large plate glass window
admiring the landscape
when a dove flew toward me
at top speed not seeing
the window as a window

The silent chapel boomed
and the dove fell down
still resilient enough
to limp and flutter over
behind some vegetation

When doves become
missiles guided by illusion
they seem little different
from the murderous hawk

Door

At the far end
of this sun-dappled,
wisteria-draped courtyard
I see a Romanesque
wooden door, slightly open,
revealing light from behind.

This courtyard is a lovely place
but the door invites me further.
Do I dare approach this portal
and open it? Walk through?
Will my future change?
Why am I so beckoned?

I push open the door and enter.

Two attendants lead me
directly to an oaken podium
set before a large audience
of robed men and women.
I am asked to give a speech.

Quietly I say to everyone:
“A speech I cannot give,
kind friends. There was
an outer door I saw ajar,
and I came boldly through,
but I am no one
you would listen to.”

The same attendants
help me don a robe,
then lead me to a chair
among the listeners.

We all sit and wait.

Taps

*New words for
the familiar tune*

We are sad
that you've gone
from this world
which is still
racked with war,
where from hate
bombs make haste—
to lay waste.

May we find
Light within
that will guide
us through dark
fears and pain.
For this world
may we care—
peace be there.

We can long
for good will
in all minds,
in all hearts,
in all souls,
but for now,
here you lie—
Friend, good-bye.

Outwhere

A rocket breaking free
from Earth's gravity is,
by dint of direction,
traveling a trajectory
into outwhere.

No limit is seen
to what is outer,
but what is inner
offers with its
infinity a rainbow
and a promise.

Let rocket people
point their probing
within if they would
make discoveries.

Far-going rockets
may be today's
Tower of Babel
reaching out and up
to an imagined
material heaven while,
nearer than our nuclei,
heaven is hugging us.

Passing and Pausing

Do you think this lived-in “Now”
could be any more about self?
Toys and joys, thrills and kills
all decorate our deadly days.

“Now’s” cousin “Then” was mayhem
aptly captured between bookends,
whereas “Will be” rides veiled on high
like cirrus clouds above the moon.

With the past a mess for certain
and the present a certain mess,
our trust must be in the future
beginning no later than here.

Passing, pausing through life and life,
caught up in matter’s unloveliness,
we still need to stay and work
and be, yes be—linked in good heart
as we walk on the road into Light.

English Teacher Unbound

Dickinson. Frost. Eliot.
Wonderful vetted poets—
but sameness of names
in every school.
My students are alive—
they need MEANING,
not biography-worship.

Bless Keats and
jolly Shakespeare
for all they wrote—
but now let's dare
to anonymize these
bards around whom
schools have
mummified their
curricula by means
of committee after
workgroup
kowtowing to
conformist after
department head
after principal as
the decades ditto on.

I'd rather pluck
new writings out of
most abundant
everywhere,
throw them all
nameless into
a vibrant pile,
then pull them up
one by three—
READ them—
BE them—
poems and stories
written by unknowns
who may inspire
and kindle fire.

I fully CARE,
but I'm captive
in this well-lit,
firmly-administered,
climate-controlled
classtomb.

SOULS come here,
parched souls.
We're to feed them
stacks of
cardboard facts
and poetic forms
to memorize—
vital to know,
we con, because
they'll be on
the final exam.

Teachers, let us
wake very much up!
Dare we transcend
the tried and dead?

Let's each write a sonnet
on why we don't read
sonnets—or an elegy
for the deceased
meanings of passion.

What would Shakespeare
write about our schools?
“Much Ado about Atrophy”?
And Robert Frost?
“The Railroad Not Taken”?

I am nobody
to be writing like this,
nor am I in your syllabus,
but I can still breathe.

A Vision

Our new world is coming,
devoid of rage,
with creatures not eaten
and guns melted down.

Its two-party system
is cordial and fair—
the Forwardists move
as the Holdists delay.

The trade is quite honest
and arguing's rare
as the selfish now give,
the ambitious now serve.

How can this world
ever work? you may ask.
Aren't giving and serving
quite dull? you inquire.

We will see as we go,
but the strife in the old,
based on you, me, and them,
was a nightmare of self.

What mattered the most
was mostly matter,
that dubious deity
for eyes that see down.

Our new world is coming
between all the bullets
and bombs—yes, coming
as surely as daylight.



About Alan Harris

When Alan Harris was born on Sunday, June 20, 1943, his father, Keith E. Harris, was piloting a B-17 in bombing missions over Europe while his mother (Margie) worried about Keith lovingly from Illinois.

Schooling in Earlville, Illinois (Alan's home town) was interesting, useful, and generally free of creativity (do what the teacher says, get the good grade). From 5th through 12th grades he played the trumpet in the school band and enjoyed the contest trips. His father drove a school bus as part of his living (farming was the other part), and if Alan happened to ride on his father's bus, he had to very much behave.

Illinois State University was where Alan became chagrined over how a student with a full class load could possibly keep up with all of the assignments given in said classes.

He felt he was a pawn in a game, but with judicious time-shuffling and corner-cutting he plowed along and made respectable grades amidst all the worries.

A bright spot at ISU was taking a contemporary American poetry class with Dr. Ferman Bishop. Through him Alan discovered depths in poetry that he had never dreamed of while in high school. E. E. Cummings took him for zingy flights of in-your-faceness. T. S. Eliot, whose symbols even had symbols, fully baffled him. Robert Frost was slyly charming. Emily Dickinson's mastery of rhyme and meter for conveying soul and spirit made the young poet's heart go funny. Alan started "being a poet" in his sophomore year (1962) at ISU. Poetry had been previously unneeded in his life but now was available to contain parts of his soul that he hadn't realized were there.

After graduating from ISU in 1966 there was the little matter of having to earn a living, which took the form of two years of high school English teaching, three years of tuning and repairing pianos, and (after a 1976 MS in Computer Science at Northern Illinois University) about 25 years of computer work (mainly programming, in-house computer teaching, and Web development—for Commonwealth Edison Company in Chicago).

During most of that vocational stint before retirement, Alan continued to write poems. Even with the whirl of commuting it was still possible to emote at home. He launched his current Web site (www.alharris.com) in 1995 with a few poems, and eventually has populated it with almost everything he has written. As a poet, essayist, story-writer, and photographer he has spurned the print publication route, having seen the excruciations gone through by other writers trying to make a big name and big money for themselves via magazine and book publishers. With the Web, there's instant publication, moneyless communication, and a worldwide potential audience. Of course, the literature has to stand on its own feet to get readers, but it's always there for those who seek it, or just happen in, or get sent in.

Alan met his wife Linda at ISU in 1962 and they were married in 1966. Linda has worked as a school speech therapist, insurance medical office worker, and medical transcriptionist, in addition to being a conscientious wife, mother, and grandmother. They have a son, Brian, who is a percussionist.

