

Inward in Words



Poems of 1990

by Alan Harris

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**The flower hides a seed
and the seed hides a flower.**

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April of the Spirit

In this April Sunday
there is pure spirit
scenting all the air
like a sweet candle.

Spirit runs through me
like light through a prism
and splashes all my glands
with a rainbow of loving.

Spending spirit is a joy
and a joke, for no end
is there to it—
as well spend the sea.

When my brain tunes into
spirit's primordial hum,
there are no surroundings
but the starlit cosmos.

I sing into the center of being
whose bud bursts open
and flowers into a fragrant chant
for April eyes and ears.

Amen says all, sings all
that ever will be sung—
begins and sustains and ends
our euphonious zodiac.

Beneath a Flirtation

A trembling in your hand
as you speak with it
tells me a story far deeper
than the message in your voice.

Your eyes glance to the side
then bounce back to our center,
penetrating my defenses
with a direct melt.

Clever words dance about
your acrobatic tongue,
and we laugh at their ballet
when the sentence ends.

Where is your soul hiding
inside this communication?
What messages are you
sublimating into my inner ear?

I'm hearing a cry for help and love
from deep inside your lilting voice.
I would offer to rescue you,
but I'm nowhere safe myself.

Let us just enjoy our fan dance
of foxy phrases and fencing eyes,
of flashing hands and smiles,
of gambling give and tricky take.

Quickly as our conversation may
cavort and twist and frolic,
its loving undermeaning remains
calm as Mona Lisa's smile.

Bittersweet

You hurt and struggle.
You are ripped apart
like a coupon out of a newspaper.
How can you or I mend you?

When the spirit bleeds,
words are worthless,
sympathy simpleminded,
blessings empty.

I hurt too.
My soul slogs along under
fearsome boredom
and capricious desires.

I am a blip in a flippant universe
wishing for an exciting peace,
a pleasant insecurity,
but I waste away in dull comfort.

Cry your tears into this saucer
as I cry mine there too.
Let us mix them now together
and drink a quaint communion.

We may be maudlin,
stupid and sentimental,
but love tasted in tears
is heady wine against sorrow.

Contemplating Shirley

We worked well together
selling mystical books
to mystical people,
honoring their Visa cards
and their souls.

Our store was fragrant with packaged incense
and alive with hermetic energy from crystals.
Our books contained
the most magnificent perceptions
that money can open windows
into.

We played music all day
of flutes and harps
to reach our customers' hearts.
In a kind of preheaven we glided
through our store hours
with no eye to the time
or the weather outside.

There was the cancer, yes.
It sounded an undertone
in your voice
and added a depth to your eyes.
The chemo stole your hair
for a while but you kept on
selling inspired books
on healing and wholeness
until your curls grew back,
more blond and beautiful
than ever.

Now your body has transformed
into a clear vapor and a few ashes,
but I still see your warm eyes
and reserved smile
as clearly as when body
was your instrument of being.
I hear your quiet voice,
not the words but the quality,
and I know you are fine.
You left behind a gentler world
to come back to.

From Beyond

*Dedicated to the Memory
of Gerald R. Detmers
(1934-1998)*

Floral gatherings
are here tagged
with your sympathetic
signatures,
reprimanding
my hastification
toward the flimsy
hand of freedom
that lifts me
into the underheights.

You may freely glorify
or scorn my memory
now that I have reached
below the neath
and behind the horizon
of hurry.
Burn and urn me
if you will,
but I am far too far
beyond the mold
for any engraved
fanciness to hold.

But let the children
chant their games,
the clouds glide
freely by,
the giant world
pulse free breaths,
for I blend only
back into a whole being
from my little island
of dinky doom.

Be, merely be here with me
as my brief obituration
slides through the air
like a telegram of smiles.

Job Interview

Through my windows
I see your windows and frame,
your curtains, shutters, and paint,
but I know zilch of the private
hassles and jollities in your house.

I properly inquire about your degree,
your courses, your work history,
and then watch you dance
your verbal employment jig.
But I must not ask into the chasms
of your being
where lies the real you—
such would be corporate taboo.

I do hear that catch in your voice
over a certain part of your past.
I do see that eagerness
to dwell on a fleeting achievement.

I am Sigmund Freud
analyzing your vocational dreams,
and you are Napoleon Hill
thinking and growing rich.
You are strategizing on your side
of the chessboard by all the rules
as I offer gambits here and there,
then inscrutably castle.

Whole dictionaries of words remain
unspoken in our 45 ticking minutes,
and yet somehow
I recognize my story in yours.
You and I are each someone
struggling to carve out
a safe and joyful survival from
a murderously mysterious world.
We are each a failingly successful,
triumphantly agonizing being
making small steps
toward what appears right.

You misread me
if you see in me a company man.
I am in a way you,
on trial,
absorbing what meaning
can be made of our encounter.

You wonder what I am thinking
as I speak glibly of opportunities,
and I wonder who you really are
as you smile with hollow confidence.
Will I give you a favorable rating?
Will you make us a good employee?
Fate has hung you and me
in her balance
on either side of this empty table.

When we go out from our room,
we will shake hands,
smile pleasantries,
and fade back into our
respective anonymities,
each hoping we have done
right by the other,
and each knowing we haven't,
quite.

Lawful Body

Someone or I built me a body
to serve as my earthly house,
which, so long as I respect her laws,
carries me without complaint.

Whoever I am wants too much
sometimes and overstrains my body
by climbing to futile heights
or pleasuring too much,

but body keeps me legal,
staging strikes and slowdowns,
suing for her rights
through ills and pains.

All around me I see
billions of other bodies too,
each tethering her curious occupant
from straying too far into folly.

Lawful body constrains caprice
with motherly insistence until,
strained and weakened, body herself
gravitates into a waiting grave.

When earth-given body releases me
and melts again into her humid earthy matrix,
I will float freely to an ethereal electricity
to greet forgotten shining friends.

Dust falls to greater dust, indeed,
but soul buoys up to radiant Soul
like a child rushing gratefully armward
into all it knows of the maternal Eternal.

May Nocturne

Half a cool moon
peekaboos along through leafing trees
over a suburban sea of haunting sounds.

I follow the dim white sidewalk,
hearing rhythmic whispers
from my hush puppies,
when suddenly a vigilant Pekinese
barks out its puny protest and retreats,
chain dragging against wood.

Evening's sonic ambiance
flows intravenously through me,
every outer sound seeming to well up
from some ghostly inner depth.
As I move along, a faraway car honks
a velvet chord into my core.
Now a strobing jetliner
thunders overhead
and reverberates in my belly,
the after-rumblings in its wake
fading away into a silence
too immense and profound
for human thought to fathom.

I stop beside a fragrant lilac bush
and stare at the sky's endless upness.
The waning moon seems content
to be quietly lunar,
lopsidedly smiling from its effortless perch.

Aloud I ask the moon,
"Where am I?"
A startled bird flutters in the lilacs
to let me know I am right here.

Release from the Known

Where did we meet?
Where before have I seen
your steadfast resilience?
In the snow on a mountain?
Have I seen your eyes
in churning blues of seawater?
Has your voice laughed
in the rain on some porch roof?
My knowing fails.

Being with you
is so far beyond and above
knowing
that I gasp at the depth,
as if I were to emerge
out of a challenging forest
and stand surprised
at the brink
of some Grand Canyon,
the fragrance of familiar evergreens
pouring over the edge
into this optical impossibility.

In school we learned hard and long,
hoping to know our way into a future,
but now an approaching endlessness
is vaporizing
every drop of knowing
we ever gleaned
and sweeping us away
in the singing wind.

However unknowing,
we can do,
we can feel,
we can think,
we can be,
and we can
(most yes of all)
love.

A being is fullest of can
when emptiest of know.
Witness the majestic power of weather
around our deeply unknowing globe,
or feel within all your organs
the fathomless tides fluctuating
under lunar and solar urgings.

Breathe, breathe with me,
my sweet companion,
as we sally confidently
into a smiling unknown.

Rose Cross

I survey this rose,
seeing into its center,
in and in
to a divinity fed by rainwater
and sparkled by sunfire.

Never was this rose
merely a pretty flower.
It blooms big in the center
of the Cosmic Cross,
bathed in blood-red tones.

The center of the Cross
and the center of the Rose,
conjoining,
reveal and conceal
the Crux of Creation.

Was there in our universe
a big bang
with no one
in the forest to hear it?
Were there thorns
before there was a rose?
A cross before there were saviors?

Look into the center of this rose,
dizzily down into
the center of your head,
for the source of the big bang.

Search into the cross's crux;
drill into the core
of your own hurting heart
to find a blazing forth
of eternity's splendid light.

Now take this rose,
this cross.
Hold them dear until
the next big bang,
which no one will hear
either.

We will know each other
then as now,
for we will say a secret word,
which is _____.
Remember?

Silent Exchange

Settling down to meditate
in my book-lined alcove,
I gaze at Buddha on the shelf,
sitting palms up, cross-legged, calm.
What is he? Where is his mind?

Deep oceans roll between us,
the Buddha and me,
even though his cast iron likeness
is solidly planted before my eyes
among amethysts and books.

His sloping shoulders and benign face
reveal a radiant humility
surely possible to humanity,
yet seldom found in bodily beings.

Where is your mind, Lord Buddha?

Your focus seems a thousand miles within
as you meditate here
in silent serenity.

May I somehow join your journey?
What must I do to walk your path?

A sunbeam shines now
through the nearby window
and rests on Buddha's heart.

"Look within," he whispers innerly.

"Look within for a pattern of being
that will respond to your aspirations.
Consciousness is supple and supportive
if you discover and respect its laws.

"Bliss abides in every inch of space,
and will be found hidden in the obvious.

"Master nature by obeying her perfectly.
Examine her ways, ask her secrets,
and use her for the benefit of all.
Blessings accrue to the workman
who skillfully unfolds a subtle pattern,
then shapes from it a living temple to truth.

"You live in the pattern
and the pattern lives in you,
as the flower hides a seed
and the seed hides a flower.

"Proceed now into your peace,
into your meditation.
Leave my sunlit statue here
and turn to your inner light.

"Slip softly into the shining sea
of possibilities,
releasing love into life
as life releases you into love.

"I will be here when you return."

Siren

A siren in the summer distance
wails poignantly up and down,
growing nearer and louder
before fading away beyond hearing.

Was it a policeman chasing a speeder?
An old man rushing in an ambulance
toward his last broken breath?
A fire brigade hurtling toward heat?

Sitting in a lawn chair by my driveway,
I offer a moment of silence to the siren
and to whom it has singled out
for justice or help or death.

“Who was it?” I ask the evening sky.
No reply—no sound now
but a breeze rising in the maple trees
and a low howling from the neighbor’s dog.

Who, indeed, was it? Someone I know?
My best friend? My relative? My neighbor?
Will I find the answer
in tomorrow’s newspaper?

The mystery of anonymous tragedy
grips my soul like a magnet.
A siren seems to drill a hole in my heart
to let love flow out to the victim.

In the wailing of a siren I hear
an anthropomorphic moan of failure,
a human weakness confronting a greater law
in tooth-gnashing agony.

Sirens will wail on for humanity of the future.
Speeders may give up or escape,
old gasping men may live or die,
fires may burn or be quenched—

but when a siren splits the air, I turn within
to nurse a pang within my own heart.
As with the tolling of John Donne’s bell,
the siren wails for me.

Sunday Profundity

As the sun pulls up
the blanket of night
to its western chin
and sinks into slumber,
our neighborhood transforms
into a blend of haunting sounds.

An owl cries out—bats flit by—
something whispers in the grass.
A distant rumbling train wails out,
then wanes undulatingly away.
Two hidden toms of a feline triangle
howl their indignity into the dark.

A throaty sports car rushes by
with radio booming
to replace
the dangers of silence
with the safety of din.

The neighbors sit and gesture indoors
like a mute puppet couple between the curtains
of their lamplit picture window,
their children eating popcorn near a vacuous tube
that splashes youthful eyes with artificial color.

No boundaries here outdoors
except the neatly folded edges
of the universe, tucked in
behind a sea of gleaming stars.

When Monday morning opens up
its brilliant eastern eye,
a thousand fervent birds with thrill
and trill their greetings
through the bedroom window glass
in rows of mortgaged homes,
alerting sleeping citizens
the coast is clear once more
for them to venture outside
(after coffee)
to their dewy cars
and motor off into their week.

Thanking the Sweet Silence

An exquisite calm has set in
after weeks of chaos in my being.
That thunder, formerly so rockingly loud,
is now a muted murmuring in the distance.

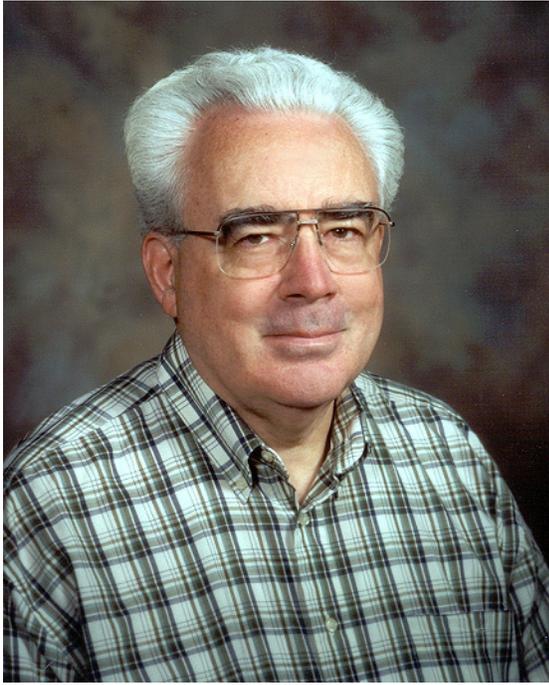
My new peace is no more explainable
than the prior violence of vibrations
that was ripping my heart out by the roots
and leaving me to decay by a careless roadside.

Would that there were someone to thank,
even myself, if I somehow caused my own release
from those taut janglings and knifelike fear
into a timely if startling serenity.

The planets and stars are so hushed, so calm
that there seems little reason
for any iota of human stress and strain.
To emulate our silent orblike brothers

would seem enough to find peace of soul and mind.
But every orb has earthquakes, storms, and seething fires.
Its quiet, beaming benevolence through clear skies
may be a billion cataclysms deep.

Thank you, silence, from the depth
of my tumult as well as the pinnacle of my euphoria,
and may you permeate my porous existence
with a tempered bliss from deeper down than death.



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 Tucson percussionist.

