

# *Flies on the Ceiling*



*Poems of 1999*

*by Alan Harris*

**God? Even this fly  
walking across the ceiling  
stops often and prays.**

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*Noon Out of Nowhere:*  
*Collected Poems of Alan Harris*  
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## A Haiku Quilt for Y2K

My house is burning--  
a neighbor has brought coffee  
which tastes excellent.

Hill of snowy pines--  
has anyone let you know  
about Y2K?

A falling red leaf  
lightly taps my left shoulder.  
Yes, I say--I've heard.

Orange maple leaves,  
why can't I prolong your lives?  
"We're the clock for yours."

Sitting by flowers--  
silence--until a petal  
falls upon a stone.

Spring rain is falling  
on a fountain shooting high--  
not a drop confused.

Water drop forming  
on this tree leaf tip--how does  
it know when to fall?

Open, empty truck  
parked beneath a star-filled sky--  
what is there to haul?

The sun rises red  
and fifty more pedants are  
experts on haiku.

Desert sun cooling  
hotly down the western sky--  
lizards blink, stir, wait.

Lazy snow circles,  
crystals landing like light planes  
on brown grass runways.

Tulip buds in rows  
bloom by bloom become cannons  
shooting at the sun.

War in your closet  
hangs somewhere behind your clothes  
needing awful love.

New snow -- old snowman  
leaning in the yard next door,  
one coal for a wink.

## A Millennial Date

I'm so glad we know of  
this magical forest--  
don't the clear waters here  
make us look younger?

End of the what?  
Oh, that.  
Here, let me pour you a Coke  
from our picnic cooler.

Diet or regular?  
With or without ice?

Of course, a toast--  
here's to this endless earth  
we've made and are made of.  
May our one-triple-nined  
planet contrive to survive  
this year of broadcast hysteria,  
and may the Christian  
clickover of 2000 somehow  
transform trumpeting holiness  
into selfless silence.

Magic tricks?  
No, I have none.  
There's so much magic  
here in this forest,  
here on this earth,  
here in our hearts,  
that any more  
would be less.

Safe this year, are we?  
As safe as we feel, I'd say--  
and as safe as we love,  
as safe as we give,  
as safe as everything  
we don't understand.

We are flies on a ceiling  
which is also the floor  
of a marvelous room above.  
Count that room's years base 10  
and it's a third millennium.  
Count them base God  
and oneness is far enough.

Another Coke?  
Yes, thank you.  
A toast to all the magic  
that keeps us safe  
and all the daring  
that keeps us magic.

## Briefing

Here is who you will be:

I. M. Ego  
#1 My Place  
Selfville, Body

Remember your address  
and don't neglect  
to decorate your walls and  
keep your place unsoiled.

You need to live here, yes,  
because your past exertions  
somehow built this place  
according to your own design.

Here you'll be safe,  
with one catch--  
you may not think  
you are.

"Ego" has grown to be  
an ugly word,  
you'll notice, but it  
only means your walls.

How could you reach  
a later hatching into light  
if forced to learn and grow  
unsheltered by these walls?

Now go, be, love, talk,  
laugh, err, create, teach,  
glimpse and lose and  
glimpse the light again.

Anything is permissible but  
everything is accountable  
while living in this dwelling  
that restrains while it protects--

until the day you hatch  
into the waiting sunlight  
with a realized reaping  
and a grateful weeping.

## Watching No Baseball

We are sitting behind left field,  
you and I, alone in the stadium.  
We watch home plate where  
no batter swings at no ball  
that no pitcher has pitched.

Intently we follow no action anywhere.

The scoreboard contains no numbers  
about forgotten innings.

Behind home plate  
no umpire fiddles with  
his protective pad  
or runs the game with  
shouts and gestures.

We are very much here.

No catcher signals for  
crafty pitches to be hurled  
from the vacant mound.

We sit here  
safely upheld by bleachers  
empty of roaring rabble.

Undwarfed by  
an immense space  
entirely eventless,  
we inhale silence.

No need for talk.

After just enough  
emptying of minds,  
seeing everything that is  
and isn't here  
from arbitrary seats,  
we know that it's over.

Down the winding exit stairs  
we climb without a word  
behind no crowds  
to the busy sidewalk.

We exchange glances  
but don't need to say  
who won.

## What Lies Ahead\*

What lies ahead no human mind can know--  
Tomorrow may bring happiness or woe.  
We cannot carry charts  
Save the Faith that's in our hearts  
As down the Unknown Way we blindly go.

**\*Note:** The above poem was not written by me, nor have I been able to discover the name of its author. I found it handwritten on the opening page of a 1941 wartime scrapbook kept by my grandmother, Theda M. Harris. I was strangely moved by this poem and felt it to be worth preserving and sharing. I'd be grateful to anyone who can tell me the name of its author.

--A. H.



## An Evening Question

Blackbirds crackle random  
sonic pepper under fading skies  
at end of day when silence  
brings more pain to birds  
than sounds held in can bear.

Up west, three backlit  
afterclouds, blue-gray,  
suggest a breathless blessing,  
outer sky to inner eye.

Two robins try antiphony  
positioned fence to fence  
and trade their choruses  
across a subtlety of dew.

Overhead, a helicopter's growl  
subdues the singing birds  
who observe a silent minute  
waiting for the bully to be gone.

Next door, the dog  
barks out his being  
at something heard or felt  
and with each bark  
a girl shouts "Shut up!"  
until he does.

A cat comes walking by,  
surprised at me,  
too close,  
but quickly taking care  
to show no fear.

Quietly alert,  
I stare across  
this outdoor table--  
top all strewn with  
wings of maple seeds  
delayed from  
reaching earth--  
and I bow within.

My breath amazed  
at simple dusk,  
I fold in half,  
and half, and half,  
until there's hardly any I.

This enigmatic sky  
now closing day  
with fake finality  
while straddling  
yin and yang  
abstains from answering  
my wordless  
evening question.

## Graduation

Our ride  
slows  
to a halt

and the man says  
“Everybody off.”

We don't  
quite know  
where  
we've been

and we're a  
little dizzy  
as we step

down into  
the future.

## Shopping Cheap

Empty-feeling in this full-discount store,  
I notice others trancing by, glaze-eyed,  
behind their clinking lop-wheeled carts.  
Lured, are they, by the hook of free?  
Hypnotized by the hype of cheap?  
I wander hapless and mapless  
through thingful, clerkless aisles  
and chafe inside at where things aren't.

PA speakers storewide  
announce who-cares specials,  
demand urgent price checks,  
summon somebodies to the front, then  
resume happy snippets of syrupy sambas.

Ah! A rare tagged homo employus--  
I'll catch him and be out of here.  
"Where are the reading glasses?" I ask  
his back before he can escape.

He gives robotic directions to Aisle 5,  
cinched with a "Can't miss 'em."

Remember when store clerks  
would ask if they could help you,  
and lead you to your product,  
then stick around to make sure  
it was really what you needed?

Remember customers? Service?

Within this barn of bargains  
harried service-counter girls refund  
to waiting lines for slipshod quality,  
murmuring memorized apologies  
to jaded ears, then "Step up, please."

Remember quality? Cordiality?

Absent is any quality counter  
to make up for poor service  
at the service counter.

Employees hired here  
for ho-hum per hour  
evade frazzled shoppers who,  
from all different wealths,  
squander the numbered  
heartbeats of their lives  
to search for bargains  
planted cleverly near  
high-margin impulse racks.

Remember joy? Hilarity?

Blindly, the free market (an  
oxymoron to the credit-card poor)  
ratchets money up to our  
finely-computered investors  
who downwardly squeeze  
more work for equal pay  
out of fewer desperates who  
hate the jobs they have  
which earn the scratch they need  
to take out bigger loans.

Remember philanthropy? Altruism?

No reading glasses found in Aisle 5.  
Did miss 'em.

Aimless now in Aisle 7,  
I stop my cart to ask within:  
How might people market goods  
with love instead of greed?  
Is selfishness the ultimate?

As if an angel had the mike,  
the PA system broadcasts,  
"Follow the blue light...",  
crackles, and goes silent.

## Angels of the Sunset

Some lucky ones have claimed  
to see and even hear an angel  
or a host of them presiding in  
resplendence over countrysides  
or busy city neighborhoods.

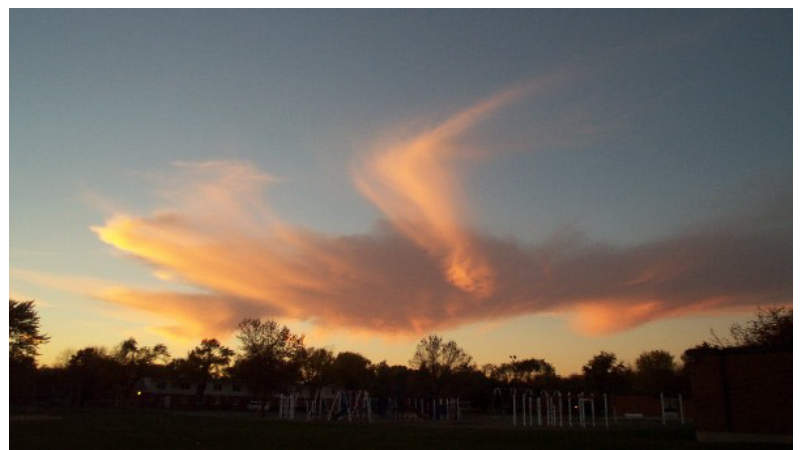
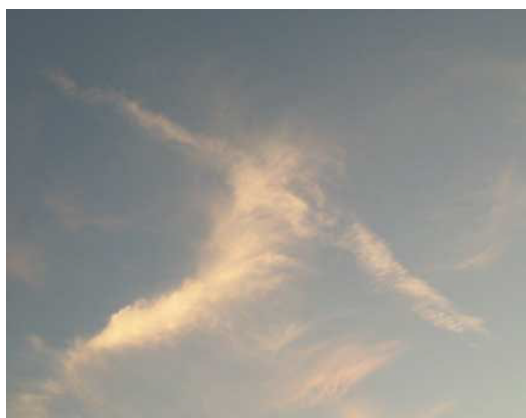
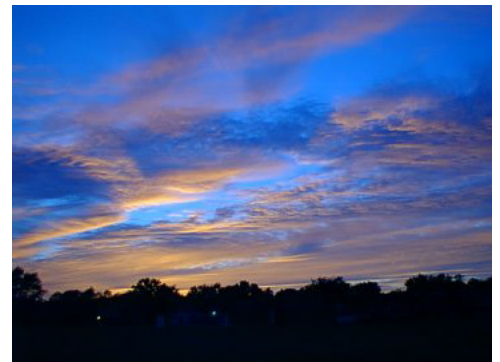
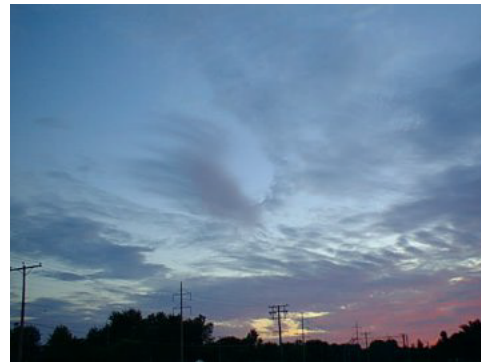
Most angels seem to hover just where  
bright meets dim, and rarely show  
themselves to televisioned eyes  
or eyes that scan stock tickers  
for the best bonanza yet.

Some people yearn lifelong to see  
an angel near their morning porch  
or, ill, pray earnest prayers  
for healing angels who will  
touch them and dispel disease.

Anyone who has a western sky  
and something of an inner eye  
may sometimes notice sunset angels  
in their dance of shifting veils  
above the darkening ground.

Concealed and yet revealed  
in colors you can see between,  
these angels bless in silent bigness  
all whose eyes are listening  
and all with openness of heart.

So subtle are the wings of angels  
that you may not realize  
they've come and gone, except  
that innerly remains a glowing  
which seems just as good as knowing.



## Meeting

Letters to mail  
and a twilit beckon  
from the dimming sky  
tempted tonight  
my walk to the mailbox  
that never seems  
to come to me.

At my first turn  
the fat, lop-lit moon  
shouldered me  
and whispered,

“I’m here with you,  
never not here.  
Turn you to dust  
or turn you to ash,  
I will be here.”

I mailed my letters  
and walked for home.

So simply it came to be--  
my ageless friend and me  
slipping past tree and tree.

## A Christmas Light

At Christmas some will doubt--  
they'd rather see first-hand  
the legendary holy child  
than hear fine stories told.

Some legends place a star  
above the manger scene  
to be a beacon guide  
to men who had wise gifts--

but if a body of heaven  
were wanted to remind folks  
nowadays of this child  
who was gifted and gave,

why not the unassuming moon,  
whose quiet beaming gives  
us all an inner warmth  
akin to Yuletide happiness?

Humbly shines this second light,  
relaying solar guiding rays  
to people lost within a night  
who wish to find a path.

Who hasn't sometimes wished  
to thank the moon for glowing  
above a ride back home  
from church on Christmas Eve?

The lowly moon a Christmas light?  
How daily seem its rays to us--  
no special star sent from afar  
that never will be seen again.

If peace and softness were  
required, the moon has both.  
If mystery were needed,  
where could more be found?

Perhaps someone is in the moon,  
as nursery rhymes suggest--  
let's grant this may be true,  
and this man or woman is you.

The moon inside you is  
your inner manger birth,  
and you inside the moon  
shine gifts upon the earth.

## **A New Beatitude**

Blessed are the shrinks  
who'll listen to you hollah  
for just a hundred dollah  
when life completely stinks.

## Gathering

A hush around the dying  
lacks nothing for no words--

forgiveness by default,  
love river-big,  
faltering philosophies,  
robbed expectations.

The air inside the air  
seems ready to receive.





## About Alan Harris

Born on June 20, 1943, Alan Harris was raised in Earlville, Illinois, a small farming community of about 1,400. His father Keith was a World War II B-17 pilot who for the rest of his life (he died in 1980) farmed the family acreage east of Earlville while also taking time out on weekdays to drive a school bus. Alan's mother Margie served as a diligent housewife and mother of four children, and for many years was Head Librarian of the Earlville Public Library.

Although he studied plenty of poems (often half-heartedly) in the local elementary and high school system, it wasn't until he majored in English at Illinois State University (minoring in trumpet and piano) that Alan began experiencing strange inner stirrings that resulted in some serious poems. His college poems seemed to spring from a new unknown place and seemed rather odd, yet were satisfying to write. Several were published in annual issues

(1964-1966) of ISU's literary magazine, *The Triangle*.

Alan and his wife Linda were married in 1966, and all through the next 35 years, new poems continued to emerge and seemed to need readers. Every year or two, between 1980 and 1995, he would assemble that interval's crop of poems and self-publish a volume to give to family and friends.

In October of 1995, having acquired some HTML skills, Alan published on the World Wide Web all of his poetry books as *Collected Poems*. Within a year he added four more site sections: *Thinker's Daily Ponderable* (original aphorisms), *Stories and Essays*, *Christmas Reflections*, and *Garden of Grasses*. The latter section, originally co-edited with Lucille Younger and now co-edited with Mary Lambert, is an on-line literary collection for work contributed by other authors.

In 1998 Alan's literary collection took on its current Web address of [www.alharris.com](http://www.alharris.com) and in 2000 was given the title *An Everywhere Oasis*. After buying a digital camera and taking it to the forest, Alan published several photographic essays and poems which are now available in the site's *Gallery*. Also offered are 76 audio poetry readings, with 20 poems being read by actor and friend Paul Meier and the others being read by Alan. New "Web-only" poetry books posted since 1995 are *Writing All Over the World's Wall*, *Heartclips*, *Knocking on the Sky*, *Flies on the Ceiling*, *Just Below Now*, and a new 2001 work-in-progress entitled *Carpet Flights*. Launched in December 1999 with co-editor Mary Lambert, a new anthology entitled *Heartplace* began accepting and publishing work from contributing authors. In 1998 Alan's son Brian composed and performed *Bunga Rucka* (a recording of which is offered on the Web site), which is based upon Alan's poem of the same title.

Alan has earned his living in a variety of occupations—high school English teacher, junior high band director, piano tuner—all of these before settling into a long career of computer-related work. He retired in 1998 after 22 years' service at Commonwealth Edison in Chicago, initially as a computer programmer, then a systems analyst, and later a computer training coordinator. For his final three years at ComEd he developed Web sites for its corporate Intranet and the Internet. Linda retired in 1999 after working for 20 years at an insurance company, but rejoined the work force in 2000 as a transcriptionist in a large medical clinic. Since retiring, Alan has been doing freelance Web design for individuals, non-profit organizations, and other non-commercial interests, as well as continuing his creative writing.

