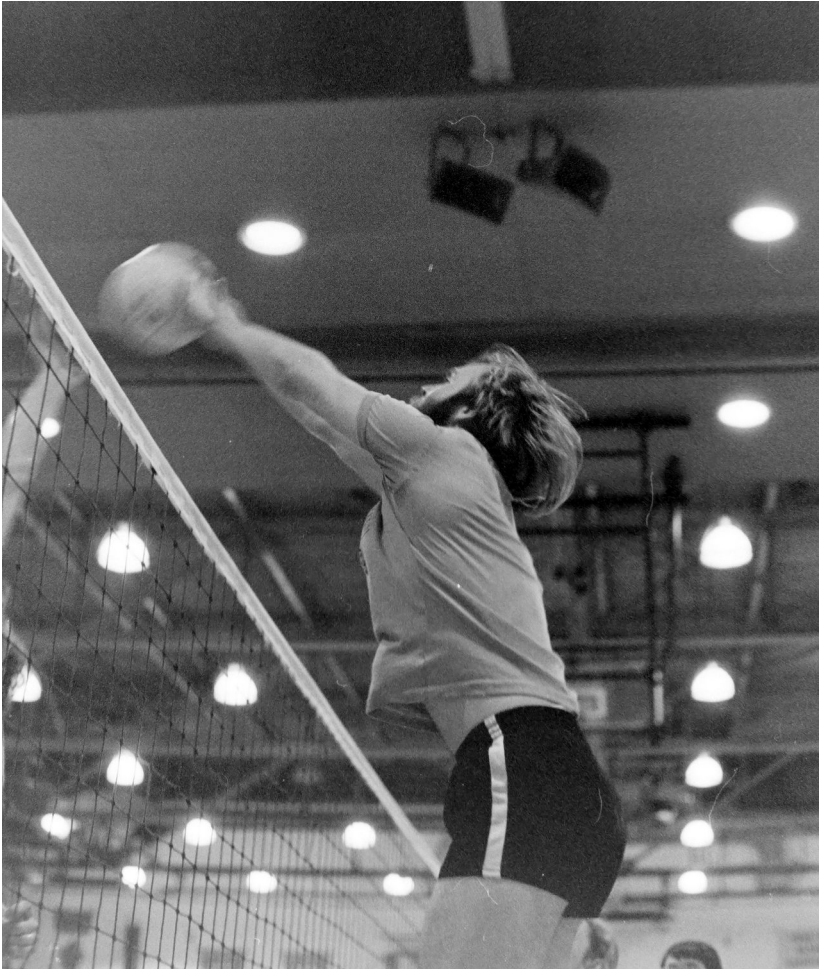


An Old Jock



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High Pain Tolerance

You seem to have a high pain tolerance
my radiation Doctor said

I was a jock my whole life
and in pain for most of it

~~

Mischief

Eyelids fluttering but not open
a crab with a hundred legs
she dreams as I watch

How do I resist
the urge to clap and yell
just to see her jump awake

~~

Wildfires

Half way through summer
and the world seems to be burning
yet here, I wake to spring
to cold nights and tolerable days

Will it continue to cool
as I get closer
Until one day
I am cold as death

~~

Old Snowfall

I read a white background
with black print
The usual
and while doing so
I notice the grey
fading to white
of this social media thing

I suppose it's modern
it's artistic
it's eversoclever
but it looks to me
like that dirty snow
you get near the street
when nothing new has fallen

~~

Sports Reporting

Following the script
I remember the days I fell
on the running track

The days I hit the bar
on the high jump
and landed on it
bruising my back
the days I ran off course
in cross country
and had to catch up
the days I threw the javalin
and it landed at my feet
the day I hit the volleyball net
and lost an earring
the day my nose was smashed
by a basketball I failed to catch
the day my hand was broken
while boxing with a friend

These are not the memories
I would like to have
but it seems
these are the highlights
according to the reporters

Some youngster, spots on his face
being injured or humiliated
I suppose the public wants
its soap operas

And I suppose that's why
I rarely watch the games
I used to play

~~

The Way Your Ass Sways

Have I written this before
The way you move
as you climb the stairs
the way your ass sways
as you walk

Have I told you
how much I like watching
as you put one foot
above the other
and that look
you throw over your shoulder
when you catch me watching

~~

Win For Us

I have discovered
another interview
with the young confessional
The girl with a relationship
that went sour
The girl who wrote about
her heartache
The girl who became
the worldwide phenomenon
and so became stressed
about repeating her success

I have watched the goat
(I don't know what that means)
who has pulled away
from the dangerous tricks
that win her medals
From the press interviews
that ask about her failures

And in all this
I thank the gods
that I am old, untalented
and past caring
about all those
who hang their hopes and dreams
on the hatrack of my ears

~~

Life Crisis

Reaching for the lotions
that I put on my head
and my feet
(the middle can go to hell)
I am conflicted

Will I be in the sun
or will it be good enough
with lotion on my head
with its bumps and lumps

The difference is opening
three containers
rather than two
and somehow this choice
seems important to me

The pressure builds
and finally I think "fuck it"
I can put sunscreen on
if I need it later
(we all know how this ends)

~~

I Want To Love You Baby

I want to love you baby
but you make it so damned hard
You never want
the things I want
and when I try to be with you
you send me far away

Everything I do for you
is flawed in some slight way
Never do I ask for thanks
and never have I heard you say

It's just so hard to love you baby
and I don't know why I stay
But stay I do
I stay with you
I can't think what else to do
~~

Just Like Yours

Fireflies flash
on and off as they float

Lying through their teeth
hoping for sex
because their ass lights up

~~

Nutrition Guide

Pepperoni, cheese and chocolate
all beside me
and I want none of them
I'm sick of them

I just want you
to be here
and I would give you the last
of the pepperoni, cheese and chocolate
~~

College Life

College life
so full of fond memories
and yet
it wasn't a happy time

But it was healthy
and I had the time
to do the things I love

I had a lust for life
Me and Iggy
and the stereo
record stores
book stores
and bars, oh lord
there were bars on campus
bars downtown and parties

Show up with a bottle
and you were invited in

~~

Another Month of Extra-time

Another month has gone by
and tomorrow I make my way
to the hospital
to see what my blood tells them

How do you feel
any pain
your numbers look great
and so do you

No more pain
than I ever felt
as an athlete

It's good that the numbers
please you
and I'm glad that you feel
that I look good

~~

You Love Him

You love him
and you believe he loves you
like the grass believes
the sun loves its greenness

You need him
and you think he needs you
like the river thinks
the banks need it to be banks

The trees know
that the wind blowing through
loves them
They know it, their leaves are moved

The fish believe
the water embraces them
the birds feel
the updrafts wish to help

And you love him

~~

Victory

When did I learn
to shut my mouth
and walk away

Or if I could not leave
to shut my mouth and watch
as my enemy warmed up
steamed up, fogged up

How many enemies
have I outlived now
and those still alive
how many have I out-lived

Oh the joys of joy
the bright lifting of weight
from off the heart
as a smile sneaks upon me
~~

Why my Photos are Backlit

The heat-haze
of South West Ontario
I had forgotten it
like I forget the air around me

The blurring of trees
into a watercolour wash
across a field
No wonder I don't care
about tack-sharp
Tack-sharp is not life

And the sun
off the lake
making me squint
from the bottom up
in that peculiar face
we beach rats learned to make
I had forgotten
but now I remember
why I see the way I see
~~

Touching a Knee

In the Maipo valley
Pam walked me into the vinyard
where we sampled the wines
after a walk around

We were given the glasses
to sip and consider
and the fat man from Birmingham
slugged his down and asked for more

Free booze I suppose
is hard to resist
or perhaps
he was getting his money's worth

But I tried them all
and heard the story
of Carmenera
and fell in love

Keep the Sauvignon
and the Chardonnay
To me the Carmenera
is like the bare leg
of that girl who liked you
in grade six
the one who let you
touch her knee

~~

I Talk to You

Once, when I could not sleep
and wandered the house
my mother would wake with me
She would make me something to eat
or a coffee
and she would ask about what woke me
and it helped to tell her

Now I make my own coffee
and sit in a quiet house
with the drip of a faucet
and the beeps of phones and tablets
and outside, the winding-whining sound
of a train engine
followed by bangs and squeaks
as the cars follow along

Mostly though
I sit and type this
because now I'm too old
to talk to my mother
and so I talk to you
And it helps

~~

You Should Thank God

Oh, the lawyer said
You're not married
you will need to get a lawyer
to fill out a form
to say you're common-law
How long
have you been together

And my mind goes blank
forever?
twenty years?
No our children are older than that
Thirty?
And after all that time
we need a piece of paper
with some stranger's name on it
to say we're married

What ever happened
to jumping over a broom
and carrying her over the threshold
When did paper
become more important
than neighbours
When did the church
get to decide who is together
and who is living in sin

The church is not law
and the government
who takes our taxes
has said we are married
since three years after
she moved in
Or some such
Without requiring more
than a look at their records

Common law
uncommon law
I'm good with those
but divine law?
supernatural law?
fairy law?
How are those still here

~~

Kim Taylor Aug 3, 2021

Facebook Time

Mike indicates
he's seen my poem
it's not even 7am
Ah the sleep patterns
of old men

Go back to sleep Mike
~~
Kim Taylor Aug 3, 2021

Won My Heart

How she found
the shrivelled husk
the black, dried shell
quite like a walnut skin
that is my heart
is a mystery to me

Even more
how she managed
to get inside
when there was no inside
to enter
It's a mystery

~~

Competitive Gardening

Our gardens used to be wonderful
one of the first
of the new breed of perennials
I built growing shelves
with lights and everything
Brenda would start seeds
from faraway catalogues
Lovingly
Carefully
the plants went into their beds
and weeds were banned

Then the children came
and the weeds
And the growing shelves
were covered with wooden swords
and the gardens
while those all around us
made wondrous shows
the gardens fend for themselves

They are becoming the gardens
of my childhood
ferns
goutweed
yucca from my mother
and a precious few
of the wonders Brenda grew
The tough
and the weeds

And I love them all the more
~~

Surprise Twist

In Canada
land of fur
and timber
we managed with the poor
who hunted
and gathered
and scabbled to live

We never collected
to any great numbers
the religious zealots
like better climes did
We never found the slaves
to run the farms
Our farmers were too poor
our farms too poor

And yet, we found our own ways
to be wicked
to forget the laws of kindness
mercy and generosity
of the milder churches
that held our milder congregants
those who weren't special favourites
of God

We found our own ways
to be wicked
We had few slaves
but many indians
and we turned them over
to our milder churches
with much piety

Oh woe this praise poem
to my country
How has it twisted so

~~

Retired Cat

Tiger (grey, perhaps striped
who knows the naming conventions
of kids)
comes in from his brief adventure
out the back door
where he looked so carefully
(him being deaf)
and shook his feet
(it being cold)
moves into his chair
(though Brenda thinks it's hers)
and yells once
to announce he is here
and to complain
about his creaky bones
before settling down once more
into the long nap of old age

~~

For So Many Years

For so many years
I loved her like a comb-over
taking the last few strands
of affection
and carefully laying them down
where once was a full head of hair
~~

Lauren Screamed

You screamed sweetheart
your infant protests
of sleep
or your teeth
or your indigestion

You screamed
and I took you
from beside your mother
into the furthest room
and tried to settle you

She needed to sleep
she worked the next day
I needed to sleep
I worked the next day
But you were inconsolable
You screamed and screamed
And I, to my horror
I thought to shake you

YOU DO NOT SHAKE A BABY
but my darling girl
I held you out
and moved you back and forth
clamping down on my muscles
almost tearing my shoulders apart
screaming in my own way
inside my rage

YOU DO NOT SHAKE A BABY

It was a symbolic shake
I swear
and it shocked me to my core

Who would have thought
that a baby's cry
would provoke such panic
such desperation, such rage

It wasn't you my darling
it was work
it was my life
it was me, thinking briefly
that my life was more important
than yours

I hugged you to me
and we both cried
and in the morning the sun rose
your mother went to work
and somehow, what was unimaginable
the night before happened

Life went on, we got through it
~~

Just Enough

As a young man
the infinite variety of girls
was a delight
So many types
so much joy at their difference

But as I had each one
and lost her
I began to see her
in crowds
in bars
walking down the street

I started to understand
that faces repeat
with just enough difference
to stop me from shouting out
to stop me from reaching out

Just similar enough
to make my heart ache

~~

By a Nose

I've always had a thing
about noses
I have no idea why
but I love the big ones
with bumps
or straight as an arrow
Equine, Romanesque
and the cute little ones
the buttons

But the very best noses
were always the ones
seen horizontally
an inch from mine

~~

Wooden Screen Door

I once, silly fellow
made a wooden screen door
and fitted it to our back room
I tried to get it to sound
like the screen door to the kitchen
in the cold house of my grandmother
Dun da dun dun

"Don't slam the door" she would say
(never, ever did I slam that door)
and yet, perhaps in protest
some sort of evidence
presented to the court of memory
I tried to recreate that sound
Dun da dun dun

~~

Spectators

In Japan they call it forest bathing
poor city folks
trying to fix a lifetime
of cement and tar
with a few minutes of green
as if such a life
can be fixed at all

There is a forest in our minds
and for some, it is a resource
a place to earn money
or respect, or status
No amount of external forest
will help
In fact, that external forest
you cannot cut down and farm
or sell off for wood
or uproot for metal
because you don't own it
is nothing but another stress

Only those whose forest
is a place to leave alone
to let be
will benefit from forest bathing
but those people
with such a forest in their mind
have no need to go
to pay their money
and stand around in the greenery
like a tourist

~~

Old

Old
and change made me old
so as I get older
I resist, more and more, change
I bemoan the loss of houses
to create little castles
the loss of wetlands
for more houses
the loss of downtown industry
for places far away
that you have to drive to
Old

So old I remember when
you could walk to work
that old

~~

Oyama Happy Road

How long was I at
Oyama Happy Road
Three days?

and yet I remember fondly
so many small things
Like the electronic ding ding ding
of the railroad crossing
So cute, it's a bell
but not a bell

I remember the hotel window
with a tiny balcony
in the middle of Tokyo
and climbing out,
working to the edge of the building
and seeing Fujiyama
where you're not supposed to see it

The hole in the wall bar
the ticket machine for beers
The yakitori sticks
where you were likely to get liver
when you figured it was chicken
The hundred yen shops

~~

Old Fart

I suppose everyone
has to sound like someone
I've put a CD of Fish on the stereo
to check out the old/new PSB speakers
and yes
one of the repaired passive radiators
is missing two screws
and it buzzes
but back to Fish
who sounds like Peter Gabriel
and I seem to remember
he sang for Marillion
which sounded like Genesis

And I sound like some old fart
who complains that nobody
ever listens to him

~~

Ready for Action

I feel like I should tell you
how difficult it is
to come up with a new poem
when a half-covered girl
is coughing and coughing
(her boobs bouncing and bouncing)

You really do have to watch
just in case you need to pat her
on the back or something
and you are only dismissed
when she says
"I got bubbles up my nose"

~~

I've Seen the Elephant

Long ago I visited the zoo
and saw an elephant
it was standing around
and looking bored
because the tourists were dull
making no effort at all
to amuse the elephant

And what, you ask, did I see
About the only thing I remember
is an ass and a back leg
the ass was saggy
but the leg looked like a tree trunk
with ridged bark
sort of a dark brown-black

~~

Waiting for the Starter's Pistol

Sick of Coca-Cola
I guess it's time for a coffee
I'll get up out of this chair
and boil water
put the ground coffee
in a filter
and pour water over it
until I have a cup-full

Any minute now
I'll get up out of this chair
~~

I Thought It Was Fixed

I thought it was fixed
but now it's not
and I'm quite angry
because when it's not
I have to stay around
fixing it
constantly

And what I really want
is to be able to walk away
and then come back
~~

Red Bay

Just past sunset
and I could have gone
over to Red Bay
where the Ojibwa
kicked out the 6 nations
kicked them so bad
the bay ran red with blood
So they say

I could have gone over
to Red Bay
to watch the sunset
There's always a lot of people
who pull in about ten minutes before
and pull out again
as soon as it's done

I'm sure an old girlfriend
said that very thing to me
Not, I hasten to add
about me
just to me
about a dude
Some dude
~~

You Must Judge

I remember reading once
about a Playboy photographer
who used 53 lights
to make sure there wasn't a shadow to be found
on the girl he was shooting

And he would get in there
with a q-tip to rearrange her lips
to the best advantage
53 lights
He must have been such a pro

Helmut Newton
used a single 500 watt spot

Want to guess whose work I like
~~

Talking to Strangers

I've never been good
at talking with strangers
on a bus
or an airplane
It's not that I'm shy
but just
(I probably shouldn't say)
that I am uninterested

That's wrong, I know
I might have wonderful times
learning about their lives
or even a wonderful life
for a little while
with them
But mostly
it never worked out
~~

Score

A Melita carafe
with attached funnel
Ten dollars or less
at the thrift store
and I just learned
that if you overfill it
and get distracted
the water coming down
meets the water rising
and it all stops
before it spills
all over the counter

I am amazed
for the first time today

~~

Is It Over Yet

Twenty minutes
from Sauble Beach
but we rarely go there
in the summer
Too much Toronto
Too much traffic
all the cars blaring their music
for the rest of us to enjoy
or else

I will wait until Fall
when the beach is cold
the water colder
and the little bunnies
have all gone on
to other things

Then I will enjoy that special time
when a tourist town hesitates
like a piece of bad news
from a fellow who doesn't quite
know how to say it
Is it over?
Should we stay open
for another weekend?

~~

Slim Chance

Sitting on the ground floor
deep in a well of cedars
I start to worry about rain

I have a bit of lumber on the porch
destined for repairs
and winter covers
in my continuing hopeless quest
to get the batteries to live
through a winter

But it won't rain
I just cranked my neck
to a painful angle
and saw some sunlight
on a couple of leaves

~~

History

Coming from Port Stanley
and the sand north of Lake Erie
where history lies lightly
on our shoulders
it is always a jolt
to come to the Bruce
where the canoes
and the boats
came through looking
for the West
bypassing the backwaters
of Erie
and Ontario

Here the history is heavy
Indian wars
The whole peninsula logged off
for oak masts as the English admiral
fought Napoleon
And a fire
that burned the second growth
and here on my few acres
I'm reliving my forestry class
watching spruce sneak in under the cedar
I doubt I'll be around
to see the oak come back
despite my throwing acorns around the place
Food for red squirrels

The towns, now sleepy
were once powerhouses
of boatbuilding
of logging
of railheads and redheads
as the Scots fought the French
for furs
(I don't know if that's true or not
the HBC and the NWC fighting
Back when this was the NorthWest)
I come from the south
where the six nations came to the land
along with our people
To the sands of Norfolk and Haldimand
~~

Predictions

Looking up at a crescent moon
I say "it won't rain"
I say "see, the water can't spill out"

I don't know who told me that
my Grandmother perhaps
or that girl from Newfoundland
I loved so much

Or was it later than that
I can't remember now
but I remember that it won't rain
if the moon is greedy
and won't let it spill

~~

For the Money

CBC is telling me
about a hip-hop star
who survived all sorts
of stuff
to sell a million records

I have no idea who it is
but I'm glad she made it
I hope all the money
makes her happy now
~~

A Fellow Wrote

A fellow wrote
"the Indians used to worship these rapids"
and I thought about using a canoe
to get around
about taking the portage
from Colpoy Bay
to Sauble, down the Rankin River
and I suspect the last thing
the Indians would have done
is worshipped the rapids

Cursed them maybe
Called them demonous
Given them a nasty name
But worship?

~~

Tough It Out

Yesterday I spent most of it
sorting out the wood shed
gathering up the garbage
and moving the snow blower
out of my shed

Unboxing a new saw
to replace the one stolen
a while ago
and building the stand

I hate these days
all I wanted was to finish a window
that is sitting ugly
in need of trim
I forgot my mitre saw
so will try to use
the thrift store wonder
(it's a wonder it is holding together)

And somehow, through the muscle pain
the joint pain
I seem to have accumulated yesterday
I'll finish the window
right after I finish the coffee
~~

I Just Had a Flash

I just had a flash
of her eye opening
and saying to me
(her eye)
What the hell
are you on about now

You see, I was nattering about something
and I was keeping her awake

~~

Hiroshima

The anniversary of Hiroshima
has passed largely unremarked
and now we can go back to sleep
knowing the brave democratic forces
will find some demonic new weapon
the next time we need defending
(maybe autonomous weaponized drones)

Something not nuclear
because the commies have the bomb too
but something equally evil
that they can use
and never apologize or feel badly about using
because, after all
We're defending a way of life here

~~

Prejudice

Another book of poetry finished
not mine, David McFadden
and to read his poems
I would have sworn he died
of cancer

But no, he lived to 78
and at the end had some sort of dementia
It just goes to show
that you get out of it
what you bring to it
~~

Cottage Time

It's going on 10am
and I suspect Pam is cocooned
in blankets and pillows
behind her closed door

A bit longer and I can put down the coffee
and make second breakfast
then the dishes
by which time it will be raining
so more waiting
and maybe, maybe

I'll get to work on that window
Such is cottage time

~~

It's On You Timmy

Looking for another book
poetry, not analysis
not biography
not footnotes
and each attempt
leads to an advertisement

OK you gotta make a living
for your free ebook reader
but Tim Hortons four times
the same add
the same jingle
four times in a row
and all I can do
is write this poem of complaint

I'm blaming this hot flash
on you Timmies
yes you
~~

First Impressions

A book of Canadian Poets it said
and in the very first poem
the author says she was born
in Chicago

OK Canadian now I suspect
but a mention of the USA
within the first half
of the first poem

Not auspicious
does nobody think about these things
does nobody worry
about first impressions

~~

Bomber Jacket

My old man
had a bomber jacket
or more accurately
a tank jacket

It was dark green
and wool
horrible itchy thing
I don't know if he wore it
in Korea
but it was in his house
and for a while
it was in mine

I have no idea
where it is now

~~

First Spill

Tipped back on two legs
I warned Lauren
but she didn't listen
and shortly
the crash
much crying
and the chair is broken

It's broken still
I didn't fix it right away
and it migrated behind the table
up next to the wall
where the catfood bag sits

~~

Not Goat Cheese

Just beginning to talk
Lauren got some feta
"What's this" she said
after spitting it out
"It's goat cheese"
"That's not goat cheese
that's cheese for goats"
~~

What He Learned

At the Frosty Freeze window
Liam wanted the biggest ice cream
I warned him, but he wanted it

All piled high it was
and as he turned from the window
all over the sidewalk it was

I was angry
The server offered another cone
but I said no

And so my son
was supposed to learn a lesson
and I suppose the lesson
was that his father was an asshole

~~

You Know Dad

You know dad
said Liam
when we were small
you would tell us to stop crying

Crying was to attract help
and there you were
so no more reason to cry

But dad,
when we were hurt
it felt good to cry

~~

Good Idea

Interesting twitch on Faceplant
when you post something
it asks you if you really want
to go away from the page
or you'll lose information

But there is a small box
that you can click
that says "prevent this page
from asking stupid things"

I can almost see the discussion
between the manager
and the programmer
"Do it"
"Fine, it's a bad idea but if you want it..."

~~

Sports News

On the news
a tearful soccer player
says he'll leave the club
for another club

I am filled with joy
about that story
about the need
to report that a soccer player
is switching clubs

~~

Ex Jock

Don't forget you were a freak
she said
as I complained once more
about the weakening muscles
and the sore back
Somehow it didn't make
me feel better

Where once the statement
"I'm going to feel that
in the morning"
was a good thing
Now it's a thing to dread
~~

Potter's Field

In my home town
was potter's field
where the nameless men
who rode the rails
the hobos and tramps
who slept down the gully
would be buried
when they showed up dead

I often wondered if potters
actually used the clay
from the graves

~~

A Dynasty

We travel, me for the first time
in at least a year,
into the big city
and I wonder how many generations
of families have worked
on the expressways
that continued to grow un-pausing
for that year

Each traffic slowdown
getting four or five new lanes
to shift the slowdown
a couple miles further on

~~

He'll Go Far

I remember a window full of panes
full of knick-knacks
on the day we left my father

Was he there
to say goodbye?

My sister left her favourite doll
so he would remember
and seeing that

I left my least favourite toy
Selfish and calculating
even then
~~

Protecting the Children

Parents make choices
children can never understand
often unexplained
because to explain
would put a burden
on those children

Was it my fault
she left
Did I not love her enough
Did they argue over me
Wasn't the money enough
to feed me

~~

A Foreign Language

Parents will always be
an unknown country
Our fathers know our mothers
long before we do
and that strange code
of symbols
from the time before us
will forever be
a foreign language

~~

Masked

In the rain-spotted mirror
she crosses the parking lot
black pant suit
spaghetti straps
and searching in her purse
for a mask

Can she not see
that I cannot make her out
for the drops of rain
Can she not see
there is no need
for a mask

~~

The Mystery

The mysteries of life
are revealed slowly
to boys

I walked into the bathroom
where my sister
had got out
of the old claw-foot tub
and saw red water

Panicked
Afraid for my sister
I asked our grandmother
what had happened

She said
"nothing for you to worry about"
while my sister grinned
Full of occult knowledge
~~

Morning saved

The coffee squirts up
coating my palm
as I set it into the holder
A function of the greed
of those who complain
if it isn't filled

Better a scalded hand
than a sip missed

But I park two spaces over
and it's a whole new view

~~

Training Schedule

What would it have been
to have a child at 20
I might have had grandkids
fully grown
with kids of their own

Children having children
Instead I waited
at 20 I had just begun
the decade of schooling
that came after
children having children

~~

Until Your Hands Bleed

My hands get so wrinkled
so dry when I do dishes
she said

And I remember using bleach
to clean the tar from cracked hands
happy to feel the pain
as bleach hit blood
happy to know the dead feeling
was just a layer of tobacco

When the day was done
I would strip on the front step
and the pants that would stand up
were handed over to my mother
who washed them
Every day
so they were soft enough
to put on in the morning

I do the dishes
to save her hands
and my only complaint
is the steak knives
carelessly dropped in
I've had enough blood

~~

My Mother and Her Husband

She hated his horny toenails
that holed his socks
as soon as they were bought
the rips in the sheets
the scrapes on her legs

She bought him new socks
mended the sheets
and washed her legs
Until he died

~~

Leftovers

My best friend
my childhood dog
never tasted dog food
he ate what was left
of our suppers

So pet food is strange to me
although our cat
eats special elder cat formula

See what capitalism gives us
I wonder what our elderly poor select
Which cat formula
As we now feed pet leftovers
to people

~~

No Distractions

Your beard smells
of sawdust she said
Concentrate I said
and she shivered

~~

Lake Freighters

The lake freighters
long slender things
to get through the Seaway
would appear from nothing

Fragile out of the haze
immobile
and yet if you looked away
then back again
they would be further
down the lake

~~

First World Problems

Doing the dishes this morning
I relive the meal I made
the salad, the ham grease
on the knives
and the dishes

The dishes go into the rack
to dry
and the flecks and pieces
of salad
Those I didn't scoop out
will, I hope, make it
to the sewer

Such is life
in the first world

~~

Canada's Sports Store

This morning I pushed
a cart around Canadian Tire
looking at what they had
looking at empty shelves
as Winter comes in

Caulk, paint and a scraper
to fix the sauna
where the shower leaks in
and, as these trips go
a set of screwdrivers
at 75% off
and a changeable tip driver
that I'll actually use

Plus a nauseous shade of red
on a miss-tinted gallon of stain
~~

The Bathroom is Pink

There are those
who buy tinted paint
in exactly the nuance
they want
after many months
of comparing paint chips
and then there are those
(yes, me of course)
who buy the mis-tints
at 20% of the cost
and say "it looks about right" or even
"hmm, guess the bathroom is pink"

~~

Fighting Fit

Once on my father's anvil
I cold-pounded a nail
into a ring

Curling the tip
in and over
so that it would rip flesh
should I punch anyone

Such are the thoughts
of the fourteen year old boy
~~

A Good Sweat

I feel a bit sweaty
and the fan is blowing air
that feels a bit moist

Oh damn
The windows, open all night
to cool the house
are still open

~~

While You are Asleep

While you are asleep
I putter around the house
trying to stay quiet
making my breakfast
sometimes writing
sometimes just watching
the birds or the cat
and then, when the time is right
I creep into the room
to catch you asleep
wrapped in strange ways
I take a corner of the cover
and gently tug it down
exposing your ass to the air
and about half way there
you start to smile

~~

Consistency

As I drive
I stretch out
to adjust the volume
of the radio

If you were to film
this front seat
over the many years
we've owned this car
there would be a ghostly arm
tracking from shoulder to knob
almost exactly the width
of my hand

~~

Lockdown Blues

This loneliness has been hard
this isolation
I am told but I can't understand

My love of solitude
has never wavered
I would be quite happy to
"shelter in place"
for years

If I desire company
I have but to connect a device
and there are people there

Such, I suppose
is the legacy of growing up
disconnected in the town
and distanced in the country
~~

Bonus Round

When I filled this cup
I noticed some grounds
and made a note
not to drink them

Now that I have finished
the cup
not all the grounds
are still there

Well, more for me
~~

Fifteen Minutes

Sometimes I try
to figure out who this
comic book hero is
I follow the links
the histories from the fans
and get lost in a sea
of alternate universes

I grew up, I suppose
in the Silver Age
(who knew what that was
when we were kids
they were just comics)

but, being poor kids
we had a box of comics
from a couple of decades
whatever our uncles
and other uncles
gave to us
along with our own few
contributions

Did I remember
some of the golden agers
the Dr. Fates, Flat-hat Flash
I don't know
I remember Herbie and his lollypops
and Plasticman
and Donald Duck comics
where I learned to read is-land
for island

I try to figure out who is who
and give up after fifteen minutes
enough fame for a comic hero I guess
enough time for me to spend
on my youth

~~

Earwax

With unbent paper clip
I dig around in my ear
chasing the wax
I'm sure is there
but the hearing is not
blocked by wax
(it's age)
and the tickles are not
caused by wax
(it's old man's ear-hair)
~~

The wood that washes up
on the beach
is bleached, smooth
and sinuous

So much softer
than the rough, dirt-covered
violence of the farm fence
made of tree roots
ripped from the fields

Both seem gone now
from my world
the only reminders of each
are the lamps someone made
that were in my grandmother's home

~~

Where Is The Sweater

Where is the sweater
I was supposed to knit
All the men in my family
knit a sweater

Don't ask me why
probably because the hands
need something to do
in the evenings before TV
before social media
when one had social relations
with one's womenfolk

There they are knitting
while they talk to you
"show me how" you say
as you look for connection
as you look for something to do
with your hands
And there, months later
is your sweater

~~

On the Death of Petunia a Pig of Panama

If only I had a poem
to go along with this title

~~

Not Disneyland After All

Driving through Tokyo
in Japan the idolized
Japan the wealthy
Japan the orderly

I was relieved to see
under the overpass
next to the waters
flowing in concrete
the colourful tarps
of the homeless

~~

Now I Am Twenty

My doctor said
it was good that my mind
is young
It is twenty
old enough, body big enough
for the bullying to stop

A good age
Under my monitor
is a speaker stand
bought for me
by a wonderful girl
to use under the speakers
my mother bought me

This is how old I am
this skin I inhabit
is simply the world
a reflection of a life
spent rubbing up against the sun
the wind and the waves
not to mention keyboards
and lab benches
and bar-stools

Me, I am twenty
just emerged into the world
just learning about girls
and life
and I suppose
looking at this skin bag
about the end defining life

~~

Breathing is Important

She was the only person
I've ever met
who said yes
on the intake of a breath

And when she drew that breath
and said yes
that first night
the sound of it drove deep into me
~~

Loose in the Timeline

I know it's wrong
to see your ass
and think of hers

It does no honour
to either of you
and I understand that

But you look so much alike
your bodies so close
that I get confused in time
~~

Sun Across the Sky

There is a tree
that blocks the light
Not some matter of seeing
but a matter of heat
pumped into the crawlspace

To take down the tree
another must be removed
and perhaps another
these things are difficult
but a matter of an hour
makes a difference

~~

Crowded

At school
life moved semester to semester
The women flowed in
and out of my life
semester to semester
Such an easy way to part
There for a while
and then gone

So why is that life
inside my head
so difficult
Why do I have a hard time
letting go of these women
who parted so easily
Why do they remain
~~

Just Gone

Did I? Did I break up with her?
I can't remember
no fights
no tears
one day I turned around
and she wasn't there

If I were to meet her again
as I turn a corner
would she put her arm
through mine, like she did
and walk with me
Would she tip her head
onto my shoulder
~~

Watersports

Ice-water lakes
or maybe puddles
beside the curb
as the sun warms the air

The hard-packed snow
has blocked the storm-drains
and we used to chop little rivers
from puddle to iron
to watch it grow larger
Is it erosion
or melt that we see

The water would undercut
the ice patches
and we would step on them
to hear them crack
to see them collapse
and somewhere the oceans
undercut the ice

~~

Playing Doubles

She came in and out of my life
at odd times
usually inconvenient times
but I didn't mind

She was always there
on the couch at home
whenever I came back
from wherever I had gone

They would trade places
sometimes, these two
but never for long
Travellers go, others stay
~~

And Now I Don't Know Either

I rehearse and rehearse the memories
and I don't tell you the names
but I just started to name one girl
short blond hair, she cut mine
and ended with another
long brown hair, who didn't

~~

A Few of Her Books

What is it that makes me say
that the little things she left
were left by her

To say they are mine
would have saved argument
with those who came later

Some
Others gave me that look
that said "you are such a sap"

But I never cared
They are not mine
and I won't throw them out

~~

Throw Out The Rulebook

Each mistake I made
each woman I lost
I made a note
So that next time

But each woman is her own
and all the rules I made
all came to nothing
Each had her reason to go

~~

Soundtracks and Longing

Of all the things I miss
without my daughter
I think I miss the most
the drifting notes
from her violin, her viola
~~

It Has to do With Focus

How is it
that you can see the image
on a Daguerreotype
It's an image
on a mirror
so how do you see the image
and not yourself in that mirror
~~

Eternal Youth

She remains, in my mind
as she was
when she was in my arms

The pathetic truth
of all misty-eyed old men
and if I were to see her again
I don't know which vision
I fear most

Seeing her aged
or her seeing me

~~

How I Met My Wife

She was standing at the bar
and she scared the hell out of me
from the big city
from money
smarter than me
she was a model
the kind who get paid

But I was single for months
and I had to try
I stood up from our table
and walked to the bar
She knew me
she saw me coming
and she smiled

I barely opened my mouth
when she took my arm
and said quietly
I'm not the one for you
Then she turned me around
so we faced my table
and she said "what do you see"

She was a friend from Volleyball
and she was watching me
She was soon in my bed
and not long after
she moved in her things

~~

Marksman's Eyes

Suddenly I remember
she had grey eyes
How could I forget
Eyes that could be cold
and in an instant warmer
than any summer's day
Eyes that saw through me
at a glance
and didn't care what they saw
~~

Looking For You

Working in the shed
I find myself looking up
more often than usual
and I realize
I'm looking for you
to come home to me

~~

The Old Man's Tools

These machines in my shop
show the effects of age
the blade inserts
are chewed as old bones
and the bandsaw blade
I use until it snaps

I'm sure Liam
as he comes home from class
from the latest equipment
looks at his old man working
and shudders

~~

After Me, The Deluge

It was a long time ago
I was an asshole
I'm sure her life was happy
more happy without me
And it's none of my business
But sometimes I worry about her
The height of ego, I know
but there it is, I worry

~~

In Her Own Time

A nighthawk
She would come to bed
long after I was asleep
but I always knew
what time it was

She was never quiet
I heard the zipper on her jeans
The snaps on her blouse
The soft slither of her panties
hitting the floor

The cold blast of air
as she threw back the covers
The bounce and boing
of the bed
And finally that throaty giggle
as her hand did its own slithering

~~

Yellowjackets

It's Yellowjacket time
the nasty little jerks
are beginning to starve
or getting drunk
on fermenting fruit

Either way
they've got a temper
as they explore any smell
in the hope of food

~~

When She Left

When she left
for the last time
I didn't know it
her clothes scattered
around the bedroom

But two days later I knew
I looked at her shirt
still holding her shape
and I caressed it
before gathering it up
to catch her scent

~~

Heading to London

A bare winter road
as I drove her truck
while she slept

Rounding a curve
we were through a wall of white
into a squall
and a hundred cars scattered

I hit the brakes
downshifted and let the engine stall
then lifted my foot
and hoped we would slide straight

I let her sleep
relaxed would be best
if we hit the pile
But we stopped short

As I sighed and looked up
at the mirror
The yellow Mustang sliding
The driver's eyes wide
I let out the clutch
and thought about the steel bumper
as I waited for the hit

Still asleep
her head against the seat
I looked back at the mirror
and waited

~~

Two on Two

Somehow I'm leaning
against the bedroom door
watching as my girlfriend
and her friend
giggle on either side of me
in the bed

There is a story there
and my girl told me
but I wasn't listening
as I both watched and played
Maybe two on two was more fair
~~

Tillsonburg

It was never a pretty town
at least not to me
But over the years
they flattened it

Took it to the flat sand
Ripped out the rail overpass
filled in the gullies
replaced the old buildings
the town hall
the Carnegie Library
with a downtown mall

I left long ago
and have little desire
to return

~~

Offside Penalty

After a few months watching
I asked Lauren
how she would feel
if the boys hit the girls
like the girls hit the boys
I could tell she was thinking

~~

I Slept With You

Hey Grey Eyes
I dreamed about you last night
I was in a library
or some other place
with a table and magazines
and a woman beside me reading

In a magazine was an photo story about you
rather, about all the people around you
and later a photo of you
I was so pleased to see you hadn't changed
and that your horse was still alive
Which told me I was dreaming

I turned to the woman beside me
(I didn't look at her clearly
but she was naked
which says something about you)
and said "I slept with that woman"

She looked at the story
but wasn't much interested
and went back to her reading
I picked up a magazine
and couldn't find the story
and reached for another to look
which tells me something about us
~~

Keep Them Safe

Sometimes I wonder
what has triggered this outpour
of images into words

If I had to explain
why I feel the need
to set down my memory
of the women in my life
it would be to preserve them
as I knew them so many years ago

They only exist in my mind
the memories will fade and die
when I do
but perhaps now if you read this
you will keep them in your heart too
It would be a shame to lose these pictures
of their youth
and mine

~~

We Went Boating

The picnic table
at your parents cottage
was rough on my back
but you had the worst of it
as the mosquitoes ate you alive

Yet you gave me yourself
and this wonderful memory
which I have cherished
these many decades
Do you remember

~~

I Heard There Was a New Drug

Twice today
I had to explain my cancer
twice
I watched them struggle
for something to say

I've learned how to stop it
I talk right over it
and into another topic
They don't want to be there
I don't want to be there

And for the sake of the religious
I don't want to say
how relieved I am
to know that when I die
I will go no-place but into the ground

Such freedom to act
as is fit and proper
Such power to know
the supernatural exists
only in bad television plots

I hold those thoughts to myself
and to Pascal and his wager
I answer that I don't gamble
An impossible gamble anyway
Who can believe in a thousand impossible beings
on the off chance one of them is not impossible

Still, these conversations drain me
and I'd rather not have them
I want no sympathy
I need no kind wishes
I will perhaps be sad
that I had no more time
but I had time, and without death
there is no time at all

~~

The Learning Stages

Shu

You learn the form
the steps drawn on the floor
for you to walk
the books, the videos, the seminars
for you to hear what you need to hear

Ha

Now you think
you ask
you consider
Can you do that
Can you ask "what is this for"

Ri

You learned the lessons
More, you understood
and now you can look
now you can see

~~

The High School Gym

How is it that I remember
the high school gym
and my grandfather
with his drum sander
bigger than me
refinishing the floor
The roar of the drum
the fabric bag for the dust
And him showing me the grit
on the belts

When I was grown
when I moved to a new apartment
and my home
I rented a sander
and refinished the floors
I stripped the walls
repainted and papered
and as I did, I thought of him

~~

Dust

Dust

One day I will be dust
but for now, I'm covered in dust
Not for the first time

I have watched dust sparkle
in sunbeams
watched it rise off of chairs
as those in them move
I have attacked carpets
slung over a clothesline
with a wire beater

I have shovelled coal
in school basements
and brushed the black specks
from my arms
before climbing the stairs to class

I have threshed grains
ground them for analysis
and done that analysis
I have hoed the dirt where they grew
and watched clouds of dust
rise and settle in my sweat

I have ground wood
these fifty years
ground it for shelves
for tables and beds
and for weapons of oak
hickory and more exotic trees

When I strike my shirt
and for too many days
I see no dust rising
I become unhappy with myself
I am not working
I am not being of use
I am not a part of the dust
~~

Finally Hung

There, in the next room
is a painting of me
done by my sister

For over a week
I have looked at it in the morning
and said "I will hang it today"

~~

Dealing with Darkness

There was glue everywhere
on the wood
but also on my hands
on the bench
my pants
my shirt

A good time for the power to go out
me in my dark shop
trying by feel to clamp the wood
wondering what sort of oddness
will be revealed tomorrow

In the absence of artificial light
I went into the garden
with some clippers
and chased the bird-sown vines
down to the dirt
and clipped them

Most now wait for Liam
and the lawnmower

~~

Fading

A beautiful smile
a smile of greeting
I watched it slowly fade
as she listened
It was like her mouth didn't move
as she took in what she was hearing
But it was gone

~~

When I Die

What to do when I die
My mother said chop her up
and spread her on the garden
Nice idea but I doubt it would be allowed

Cremate me
put me in one of Steve's urns?
But cremation means CO₂ into the air

Put me in the ground with lots of formaldehyde
so I don't rot?
Are you serious, all the years I don't rot
I'm being kept away from the afterlife
(molecules getting spread around)
Forget it, I have a Masters in microbiology
feed me to my little friends

Throw me deep into the bush
and let the bears eat me?
What if they get a taste for humans?

Oh never mind
do with my body what you like
I won't be around to object

Oh, oh,
Cremate me, make me into a diamond
and fire me into the sun
That will be the green thing to do for sure

~~

I Give Up

My smart phone
is too smart for me
It gives me little messages
about this or that app
doing something
Yet I've shut down that app
hunted in all the places
I think it might be hiding
and shut it down
Here is the message again
and I think
Do what you want, I give up

~~

I Was Wrong

The day that I understood
I could admit I was wrong
was liberation day

Not in the lab
you try to prove you're wrong
in the lab
but in my life outside science
(as if that could be a thing
but you know what I mean)

The stress fell away
the fear of "being wrong"
of saying "I was duped"
fell away

Oh if only I could have said
I was wrong
when I was a child
Said it for myself
rather than be told

~~

Cheats

In trouble again
showing someone
what they shouldn't know

But this secret knowledge
is still secret
It is the shell we practice

What's inside to learn
can still be learned
from a real teacher

~~

Practice Routine

Ugh, I have to order materials
for a roof for a deck
I hate this job
It's not that I can't do the maths
I just have no place to do it

Poems or essays over coffee
Then work in the shop during the day
and teaching in the evening
The routine takes me
day to day
~~

Up At the Edge

It is a knife edge
these emotions of mine
it takes almost nothing
to tip me over
into dark moods
and darker thoughts
or manic joy
at the smallest flower
on a pathway

Where is my broad boardwalk
of five years ago
my stable platform
above the morass of morose
my vinyl roofed veranda
under the burning sun
Gone it seems
and I'm tipped out
onto a railroad track
wondering which way I fall

~~

A Good Spotter

Come save me my love
come pull me out of myself
and into your arms

I have never been safe alone
and never nice in company
but I promise, this time,

Come pull me away
from that sinking feeling
the drowning waters of my mind

Come with your mirror
to reflect-deflect my vile moods
aimed more at me than you

Come save me my love
as you have before
be careful how long you leave me
~~

Liam Learns to Ride

That moment
that instant when you learned
how to ride a bike
One moment falling over
and the next, freedom

I may not have been there
for many of your milestones
but I will take that one
as a stand-in for them all

~~

Absent Minded

I had my notebook in my hand
and now it's gone
I looked in all the places
where it was
where it was the last time I saw it
where I remember picking it up
and now it's gone

Just a notebook
but inside were notes
Notebooks are replaceable
but not what is written in them
And what is written
is gone from my mind
~~

Please Buy My Wares

It is a lifetime habit
this work thing
I am old, retired
but youth dies hard

There is the car
here are my feet
on legs that still work
yet here am I
walking toward the shop

I try
but a young man says
I must be productive
I must put aside what's good for me
and make something of worth

~~

The Secret

This is a secret
that you must not tell
Creativity comes from boredom
from silence
The secret is that thought
comes from silence
and so those who dislike thought
dislike silence

When I work at my bench
I carry a notebook
in my back pocket
I also have earbuds
which I sometimes use
and when I use them
when the music is playing
the notebook goes untended

I see this too
as I teach kata
While being told which foot
goes where
how to breathe
how to look
how to...
There is no learning

Only when the kata is learned
only when the movement
through this and that position
has been done to boredom
can the learning begin

You think this is a secret?
I only claim it so
to prevent those in power
those who want you entertained
thoughtless
from knowing that once again
I have shared what I should not
~~

New Girl

Good night, or good-bye
it was as if for the last time
The next time I saw her
I recognized her but
it was as if we'd never met

Not just her face
which was new each time
but her body seemed different
from day to day

Often I would turn around
and be startled
who is this stranger
no, it is her
I was forever surprised

~~

To a Nude Model

Stand for a moment
and just let me look

I would stare openly
look deeply at her
from top to bottom
from side to side
I would watch the way
the light would bend
around her ribs
and how it would appear
when she parted her legs

Stand there for a moment
and let me look closely

It was hard to stop
hard to take camera in hand
and begin the dance
of light and image
never wanting more
than to look
The photographs were something
but never as good
as seeing the light curl
around her forearm

Stand there a minute
while I look at the light

Yes, I am looking at the light
and the way it plays with you
You are a lovely woman
but I'm here for the light
I'm here to see it caress you
the way it feathers and flows
the way it loves you
and yes, for these few hours
I do too

~~

Long Exposure

Years before I understood
long exposure
I knew the slur of light
as a carnival ride spun
round and round
two or three lights
stretching into circles
in the warm
end of summer
evenings

~~

A Trip to the Fair

We never had the price
of a ticket to the fair
so we would move slowly
around the side of the fence
to the very back
where the tennis courts were
and then search quietly
in the dark
using the midway lights
to find the holes
under the fence
made by dogs
by ragamuffin kids
curves in the dirt
Brushing ourselves off
we would wander wide-eyed
behind the rides
and onto the midway
stopping at each booth
to watch other people play

~~

Tillsonburg II

Those humid nights in August
up past the sun
wandering through the town
with no place to go

We could tell where we were
with our eyes closed
using just the notes
that came on the soft air

Here the sulphur spring
of Coronation Park
The old coffee grounds
of the alley behind Broadway
The antique coal cinders
on the tracks
The swampy smell of duckweed
in Lisgar pond
and the sharp tang of chlorine
in the outdoor pool
where, on hot sunny days
the concession booth guys
would give us a small pop
for a full bag of garbage
picked up with a nail
on the end of a stick

~~

Hello You

I step outside
to the smell of the skunk
that lives under our deck
or in our shed
Let's face it
he lives where he wants
and we get along

Once, coming down the path
I saw him stomp
warning me that I was too close
I stamped back
and said "hello you"
then went around the other way
~~

My Grandmother's House

It's funny how I remember a room
that isn't there
The house isn't there
But the room is
with it's stuffed green chair
and the upright piano
and the electric fire
that was once gas
a deep chesterfield
(sofas didn't exist then)
and Venetian blinds
to let the sun in
one stripe at a time

~~

She Was Like That

A big moth
harmless
but too big to ignore
too fragile to grab
you try to guide it gently
out the door
She was like that

A wasp in the window
harmless now
but you know
from past experience
that you can't cup your hand
and guide it anywhere
without getting stung
She was like that

~~

What I Want to Write

What I want to write
I cannot
there are still those alive
that I could hurt
with my too-casual words
and so I remain un-written

It is enough
that some have heard the story
late at night over beers
I will not take it
to the grave

~~

Tillsonburg III

On Wednesdays
the shops closed
because they were open
on Saturday

But the two pharmacies
took turns being open
and so they had a bit of everything

My mother liked one of them
because she could buy cigarettes
on credit

~~

The Maples Along the Street

The maples along the street
are, some of them,
having a bad time

One small one didn't make it
and the mid-August leaves
are November-dry

Some of the larger ones
have lost enough bark
to cover the homeless
who sleep on the ledge behind
near the railroad tracks

Their branches
half-naked
don't look good that way

~~

I Helped Her Move Out Today

I helped her move out today
as I helped her move in
up and down the stairs
boxes of books
bags of fabric
all the bric-a-brac
of an enthusiastic life
all just so much weight
as the legs move trudgingly
up too-narrow stairs
in new shoes
~~

Careful of Corners

Protein bars
and popsicles
not to mention
cup-noodles
all open the same
a tiny corner rips off
and then you are digging
trying to separate the rest
to get at the contents

And you wonder why
I am so careful
of my corners

~~

Such a Nice Ass

So tired
so distracted I was
that I forgot to watch
as she climbed the stair

Tired indeed
to forget that show

~~

Too Short for This Shit

Many years now
I have missed the reference
(what the hell is he talking about)
and I used to go find it
(ah, now I know too)

But lately
when I haven't a clue
I still say
(what the hell is he talking about)
but then I move on
(life is too short for this shit)

~~

Comfortable Model

She didn't bother
with the changing room
just dropped the clothes
beside the sweep
and stood before me

She couldn't have been less naked
than if she'd had a parka
and mukluks over long johns
Naked isn't a matter of cloth
over skin

~~

My Mother Sewed me a Suit

My mother sewed me a suit
I can't remember what for
probably a dance

The pants and vest
were green with pinstripes
but she didn't have enough material
for a jacket
So it was a creamy yellow

I wore that suit newly
and when it came time
to tuck it away
a friend asked for it

~~

So I Would Remember

Even a dull bandsaw blade
will cut if you push hard enough
and I was pushing hard
when the wood slipped
when I bounced my thumb
off the edge

I could feel it hit the bone
which isn't very far down
on a thumb
and I figured I needed a stitch
I needed three

I told the doctor
not to freeze it
so I would remember
next time
to change the damned blade
~~

The One Who Was Deaf

After a row
after she had stormed out

My hearing seemed to improve
I could hear every footfall
every creak on the landing
every click of our door

When she came home
I would still be angry
like the idiot who lived inside me
The one who was deaf

~~

What Day Is It

What day is it
I've had a nap
and now I'm confused
Is the Amazon package
at the front door
or is it still a sleep away
~~

Cicada

Finally, today
I heard the cicada
There were supposed
to be billions of them
but seventeen years
is a long time
to be in man's poisonous soil

~~

Cold Blooded

Sometimes I lose the thermostat
It almost happened today
Out of the sauna
and into the cool water
of the outdoor shower
I could feel my body lose it
all it's heat at once
but I caught it

I refused to shiver
and in an instant
it was just cool water
after a hot sauna

~~

Some Mornings

Nothing
no poetry in the air
this morning
Some mornings are like that
~~

As If She Didn't Hear

Sometimes when I spoke to her
she would look right through me
as if she didn't hear
as if I wasn't there

At those times I shut up
and found something else to do
she would come back
when she was ready

~~

Is This Worth a Poem

The fingers and the toes
are tingling
the toes are burning
and I don't know why
Sugar level is not bad
its under control
So I need to look elsewhere

Is this worth a poem
Not in the sense
of entertainment
but in the sense
of checking my emotions
Perhaps then, perhaps
~~

How Did She Do After Me

Once again I tried
to find her on the net
She is not there
but I found her father's obituary
of last year
and I learned she was alive then
and that she had married
Good enough for me

~~

My Old Address Book

I found my address book
in an old piece of furniture
and turned the pages

It was pretty sad
a lifetime come down to this
a few names on a few pages

~~

The First Time She Left

She left me
and my moods
my meanness
at about the same time
as our roommate

She said she had some things
to work out
I was confused
as young men are
absorbed in their own heads

How could she go
surely not something I did
surely not
But leave she did
and I was alone in the apartment

Seeking answers
I followed her one day
to her new place
and realized she had moved in
with our old roommate

Imagine my confusion
he was my friend
and I would have said yes
if he'd asked to sleep with her
but he chose to be impolite

~~

When I Was Bitten By Life

If you were bit by a snake
I would suck out the poison
If you were attacked on the street
I would step in front of you

I said such things
as a young man
and I meant them
romantic sounds all

But I had harsh words
cutting words
when I was bitten by life
and I said them

~~

Four Lanes of Ugly

I drove Brenda to work
down Edinburgh
the fastest way
but four lanes of ugly

As I returned home
I turned toward that street
and after a block
wondered why I chose ugly

I turned off again
spending my children's future
in exhaust fumes
to go another way

I went down Gordon
and was happy
it's the little things
that keep me going

~~

Skydiving

There was an army man
green plastic
with a parachute
and we kids would wrap
and throw
to watch it gently sway
back to the earth

In our small town
the telephone wires
were covered with army men
hanging from their parachutes
It looked like an invasion
and we cheered
we kids cheered to see it

~~

Carpentry

I learned my carpentry
as a kid
learning that a ladder of boards
nailed to a tree trunk
only in the middle
is a bad ladder

You need two nails
separated by as far as you can
to have a chance
of getting to the tree house
~~

Text Only Please

There, online I find
one of my women
(not that I owned her
more she owned me)
She was with me
when in her twenties
and in my mind
she is twenty still

You can imagine the shock
when I realized that now
she is my age
not the age I am
in my head
but the age of my flagging body
my flaccid muscles

I stopped looking for photos
of my companions in youth
and only seek to know
that they still live
their lives were good
Text only please

~~

Welcome Home

Forty years
three wives
two kids
and I still look to the door
expecting that you will walk in
~~

Swimming Lessons

A photo of you showed up
on my screensaver
My little mermaid
you were in the claw-foot tub
suds up to your chin
which rests on the edge

What were you looking at
my slippery darling
What were you thinking
I know what I was thinking
when I took your picture

~~

Freckles

In the winter
your skin is the new snow
uninterrupted white
Now in the summer sun
the freckles appear
and each day
they seem darker
more of them perhaps
Each time I look at you
it's a new face
To match your moods
~~

A Small Slice on my Thumb

A small slice on my thumb
red from irritation
or from infection
tomorrow will tell

But today it nips
it is a small bark
from a small dog
worrying away at a sock
Each bend of the thumb
gives a reminder

You have been
a small slice on my thumb
for many years
Each time I move
You have come along
a redness from irritation
or from infection

~~

A Good Finishing Kick

The train comes through
the bell ringing its message
the horn too loud
for these crowded houses
Stay away
off the tracks

Creeping up to the last crossing
before heading out of town
I always listen for the whine
of the diesel as it spins up the generator
and the acceleration begins

They asked to close five streets
our poor wee houses
with poor wee folk
would have to walk
an extra mile or two
but the boys from Toronto
can't see why we don't just drive

They have the crossing guards now
and the reinforced track
and they say that fast is safe
and they say that a bit at a time
they will get to the speed they want
just get off the tracks off the streets
you wanted so much
when you hear that bell

~~

Cheap Gas

Thank goodness for cheap gas
My sister and I
would be sent to visit relatives
on the weekends
while the parents would stay home
with no food in the house

It wasn't until much later
that I learned we were that poor
We lived in the country
so had a garden
and chickens
and through high school
I had egg salad sandwiches
Every day for five years
~~

She Was an Angry Girl

She was an angry girl
and she would bite my lip
until it bled

Pound my chest with her fist
then put her head down
and flood me with tears

Who made her that way
I never asked
and she never offered
but I was handy

~~

The Ouija Board

We moved the Ouija board around
my first girlfriend and I
That's it, the memory is small
except it was in her living room

Years later my roommates
learned how to levitate a table
by placing our hands, even a finger
on the top
and through the wonder of friction
it would rise and float around

None of us ever thought
of ghosts or angels
we simply laughed
at the ways we fool ourselves
trying to find meaning
in the random twitches
of our arms

~~

Not The Same Old Neighbourhood

Once we knew for sure
where heaven was
Point your finger up
and there it is
Look hard enough
and you might see angels
or gods, or devils
depending on your village

Now we have been there
to heaven
and there's nobody home
Maybe they moved further out
like those who move
when the riff-raff show up
with their funny language
and their strange ways
~~

Also Eating

When I was a boy
on certain days in the summer
the Mayflies would gather
(I guess you could tell me now
that May is in spring)

They would coat the sidewalk
and the windows of the laundromat
at the top of the bank
leading to the creek
leading to the harbour

I haven't seen them for years
they may not gather any more
and I wasn't sure what they taught me
with their brief lives
of bouncing up and down in the air
looking for sex
No mouths to eat
doomed to fuck and die

Years later after a decade of education
in the biological sciences
I figure the lesson was there all along
You're here to fuck and die
If you have a mouth, also eating

~~

A Hill In Newfoundland

Lying on a hill
in Newfoundland
tent unrolled
as a groundsheet
looking up to see
satellites crossing the sky

Then it was amazing
that we could see
the stars move over us
Now I don't bother
the sky swims with motion
jets and satellites
covering the stars

~~

But Texas

Someone remarked
that it takes days
to drive out of Ontario
and another said
"but Texas"

That's cute
Most of our provinces
are the size of Texas
but by all means
hold on to those dreams
~~

The Good Book

Ah said the boys
from Joseph Smith
spotting my bookcase
That's a good book

Which one, I said
for my Satanic Bible
given me by my mother
was filed beside
the King James
(To be clear, I've read neither)

~~

Watching It All Repeat

I try to keep my head down
Watch the news from Japan
or France
or Australia
So I can be distanced
about things that
on the local news
would drive me crazy

The worst thing
about getting old
is watching it all repeat

~~

You Can Only Live Today

You want some sort of afterlife
where you can see all those
you treated poorly
You want an eternity
to make it up to them

You want to be rich
because that's the game
and money the marker
and maybe you need the cash
in an afterlife of ranks
depending on what you had
when you died

Heaven is now
here
Sit by a river
and watch a swan
land on the water

~~

Karma

I can't begin to count
the number of rich men
who, as they died
said it wasn't worth it

~~

For the Pamurai

Teaching alone
I realize how much
I miss you

You are half my skill
I am the body
but you are the brain

This morning I walked upstairs
to wake you for work
only to find you were not there
~~

I Wake Early

I wake early
but she liked to sleep late
Often I would wake
and return to the bed
running my hand over her arm
and other places
wondering if she wanted sex

Usually she said mmm
and smiled a little
so I contented myself
with watching her beautiful face
until my urge to get to work
took me from the bed

I made sure she was covered
and that I had closed the door
so I would not wake her
while I pattered around

~~

Everyone Has Their Move

Everyone has their move
and one of her best
was to raise her head
slightly
and flick her hair
away from that neck
that slender
kissable neck

It was especially great
when she would do it
in the middle of an orgasm
Her neck would arch
along with her back
and I'd laugh
to see that curve

~~

Storm Coming

Someone is moving furniture upstairs
Oh, no
it's the storm coming
and here is the rain
pounding down so hard
the radio disappears

I suppose we need the rain
but I've got work to do
mostly I need to fix the hose
that something bit through
No hose, no shower
No shower, no cleaning off paint

Time to start thinking
about inside jobs
I'm sure I will find some
just please please
not caulking the baseboards
My back is still sore
~~

The Eternal Struggle

Nothing better
than holding her
all night

But she gets hot
and moves away
too far across the bed

I reach for her
and she cuddles a bit
then sighs, rolls over

Now we're at the edge
now she puts hands and feet
on the wall and shoves me
~~

I Love You But

My kids loved to cuddle
on the couch
but no air conditioning
meant that hot summer days
were sweaty days

I love you my children
but it's too hot
Get away from me
They laughed at me
and scooted over

~~

Not Counting This One

She had notches on her bedpost
and I was one
but I never minded

Nights when I struck out at the bar
I would call
and usually, she would come
sneaking into my bed
and after a while
she would tell me of her latest
"not counting this one" she'd say
and laugh

~~

She Never Blinked

She never blinked
never closed her eyes
while I grunted and sweated
above her

Her face was always calm
as she watched my face
as if memorizing it
for a police sketch

Or maybe she was looking
for something that wasn't there

~~

At The Very Last Poem

I wonder sometimes
as I rip memory after memory
out of my poor head
I wonder what happens
when I have them all out

Do I die then?
Is that what I'm waiting for
some sort of completion
of the story
"and at the very last poem
he lay back in his bed
and was gone"

~~

Static on the Radio

The radio has become static
and I didn't notice
Has Owen Sound exploded
in the first of the Atomic Winter
or has this storm hit the transformer
outside the CBC repeater

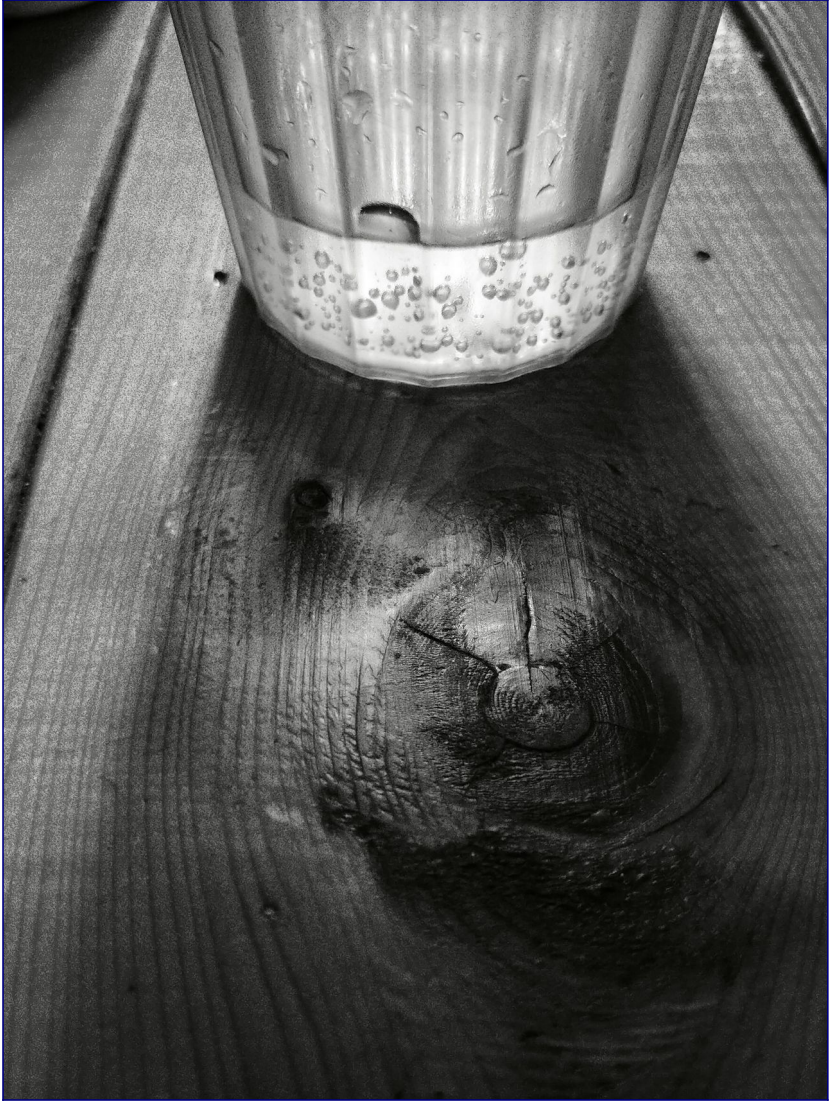
I don't know
but it's hardly worth getting up
to find out
All the radio does at this time
is cover the tinnitus
that is worse in the morning

Ah here it is again
not static
but those popular tunes
for that younger generation
Mother Corp keeps hunting
the tunes we oldsters hear
and pretend we're still relevant
~~

The Race is On

Brenda tells me
that our cat could live
for another ten years

I guess the race is on
~~



It's Not Going to get Better

As I start the phone
putting up the hotspot
for the tablet
I realize the camera
is still on
and glancing at the screen
I punch the button
Thinking, "oh, nice
like Sudek maybe"

I take another shot
How stupid
after all these years
If it caught your eye
and made you push the button
it's not going to get better

~~

I Looked Up

Oatmeal gone
and bowl rinsed
coffee poured
and re-poured
the warming water
still in the cup

Two hours
to the class
Sunday quandary
Rush through coffee
stop writing
to go to the shop
and try a chore

Or stay inside
drywall mud
paint
Oh dear I looked up
No
Head down
one job at a time
Drink coffee
~~

If I Had Known Then

A vague dissatisfaction
existential angst
if you wish
What is my role
who am I to be
and this woman
kind, loving
not at all dissatisfied
Catches the crap
that spills out of me

Again and again
Me never learning
as if "it's not me,
it's you"
Only an old man
can see
what the boy
should have known
~~

A Canadian in Venice

She walked the streets of Venice
our Pamurai
in the Fall

And as she walked
she stripped down
to the spaghetti strap top
while the locals
in their winter coats
goggled

The Pamurai smile
said it all
~~

As I Turned a Corner

While travelling
I never found you
in the monuments
the great buildings
the wide boulevards

Instead there you were
as I turned a corner
and saw a small garden
or a kind word
would float over a fence
a brightly painted gate

~~

Drama Much

Drama much?
My daughter would say
and I had to answer no

I've been to exotic places
and taken photographs
of spectacular boredom

I've written poems
about other people's pain
and fallen asleep

No, not much drama
but I can get excited
at the light through a glass

The sun on a stairway
carving abstract shapes
of shadow and light

~~

Solar Heat

The sun has hit
the solar panel
that powers the pump
that whiny pump
that runs the solar heat
to the basement

The pump that Pam
tried to cover with foam
because it woke her
in the mornings
much too early
(it is 9:19 now
as it starts)

Perhaps she will wake
and I will not need
to dump her out of bed

Perhaps
but she was up late
drinking with distant friends
while I slept the sleep
of the old men

The ones who wake
with the sun
(and several times
before the sun
to stumble to the bathroom)

I listen, hear nothing
and so it appears
she has adapted
to the pump
and I will need cold water
to prepare for the class
~~

The Best You

How do you avoid the desire for perfection
how do you avoid the need for perfection

Some use drugs
either chemical or electronic
but I find it easier
to avoid perfection with production

So many poems
so many bokuto
so many of whatever I do
and the urge to perfection fades
~~

The Olde Tymes

You must be so proud
to keep an old tradition alive

But I don't
When I was a child
I pumped the bellows
for the village smith

I watched the fishermen
repair their nets
with a bobbin of cotton thread
and dry them on reels
we used to swing on
Wooden floats
made great shed handles

All gone now
But the things I do
these old traditions of sword
are not dead or dying
They are alive to me
useful to me

I never had a romantic thought
of samurai and Olde Japon
Never played video games
never read anime

But in the living traditions
I have found meaning
While I live, they live
and I'm not alone

~~

Succession Forestry

Now is the time
to look across the treetops
and find the dead ash
To mark the trees
I will take down this winter
and cut, split and stack
to burn next year

I am thinking of planting
a few more hardwoods
they don't seem to grow
as I'd like
perhaps if I force the seed
into the ground
the squirrels will leave them alone

Of course to plant a tree
you must be willing
to gift it to the next generation
I will not see it grow
and I will not cut it
when it dies
to split and stack it
against the cold

No fire will warm me
protect me
from that cold I go to
~~

Here I Sit

I work in the shop
and decide four pieces
are enough for today
there are five more
ready to finish tomorrow

I search through a thrift store
because Brenda is at the post
and find nothing
I'm looking for nothing
just looking at the old men
wandering aimless
and blind
moving the wrong way

Salmon heading upstream
to die (no longer to spawn)
Women proud of their noses
they must be
they are sticking out of the masks

I return home
and try to find a show
Netflix, Prime, Youtube
all dish the same dish
Nothing to watch
on the five hundred channels
A book to read
to write a blurb
I find a lack of energy

Another to read
to dig for nuggets of wisdom
Again, where is the energy
Perhaps back to the shop
to finish those pieces
but Brenda says no
we have too many now

And so here I sit
typing

~~

Reckless Youth

Once Summer was easy
Shoes optional and
out the door

Now Summer is as hard
hard as Winter
with its coats and boots
mitts and scarves

Summer is now lotion
and hydration and long sleeves
and wide brim hats
to keep the sun
from where my neck
was irradiated

Today I walked slowly
to the shop, no preparation
and pretended I was a kid
feeling the sun on skin
the warmth in the bones
Ah reckless youth

~~

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