

**Poems by
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Chattanooga & NYC
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AFTER ALL SHE COULD ALWAYS FIND SOMETHING ELSE
TO YELL ABOUT, Atlanta, May, 1914 .

Aunt Em liked to yell a lot,
A widow, my mother's older sister
I lived in her house most of my early childhood
She had a strange compulsion about bathroom floors and would
furiously mop the tiles at the first appearance of tracked-in
dirt on their immaculate surface
Several times a day I would run in from the back yard bearing
on my bare feet dust which turned to mud on the damp tiles
And she would scream at me and call on heaven to witness her
sufferings and mop furiously
I could not take the simple and obvious solution to the problem
Other little boys relieved themselves unashamed in the alley
Sometimes standing on the shed, competing among themselves
for maximum volume and distance.
I could not do that. Aunt Em had taught her lesson of prudery
too well
I had to do something
I tried taking longer and longer steps to minimize the number
of prints on the bathroom floor
I found I could push my feet forward with a gliding motion
and achieve a really remarkable distance before setting
them down.
At last I was gliding along with both feet off the floor and I
stopped setting them down.
The problem was solved.
I did not tell anyone about my new-found skill, knowing
instinctly that this would only lead to trouble.
Aunt Em would look at the floor suspiciously after I left,
but found no footprints
It did not occur to her to ask how I did it.
After all, she could always find something else to yell about.

GOD OUR BROTHER

The shepherd looked into the crib and said:
"This it is who set the stars in the firmament;
This it is who stretchers forth his hand to the North Star;
This it is who leadeth or withholders the hurricane;
This is our true brother of the flesh,
Born into the common lot of man:
This , an innocent babe.
"God, our innocent brother,
Tell me, what is man?"

WHAT IS POETRY?

Poetry is what we have left
Of the magic people used to be able to make
Back in the springtime of the world.

DUET IN A MAGIC PLAYGROUND.

January, 1965.

(Dedicated to Marty Greenbaum and Lulu Farnsworth)

(Make your move - time - time. Make your move.)

The pendulum is swinging closer and closer. Soon it will shear off
neat slices of prosciutto.

(Make your move - time - time. Make your move - it's time.)

The sherry is all magically transmuted into my body and blood.

(Make your move - time - time.)

I hear the flutes of the angels.

(Time , time. it's time.)

This is the playground of the gods.

(Make your move - it's time.)

Queen's castle 2 and check.

(Make your move - time.)

The dew falls on saints and sinners alike.

(Make your move, please, it's time.)

Few fish are efficient pedestrians;

Few fish have the legs to run.

(Move.' Move.' please, it's time.)

Every catfish is a cat but what could I wish -

(I wish you would move. It's time .)

The images flow past us in searing color.

(When will mu move ? It's time.)

There is no end to this night's madness.

(Time -time -time -)

Note: This piece for two voices was written at the opening of an
art show by Marty Greenbaum and Lulu Farnsworth at the Stryke
Gallery. Films by Jerry Chasen were shown .

THE HUMAN ALL TOO HUMAN NEWS . News report from Port Moresby, September, 1964 .

The Australian police are cracking down hard on the Johnson cult

Which is spreading with alarming rapidity among the aborigines
of New Guinea.

Last Thursday they charged with billy sticks and tear gas
into a crowd of 10 ,000 who were chanting:

We wantum LBJ 1

More and more of the tribesmen are refusing to pay taxes to
the Australians .

Instead they prefer to put their taxes in a special fund . They
want to purchase President Johnson, bring him to New Guinea,
let him be their ruler.

Already the kitty contains \$4,09 7 dollars and 82 cents.

Tax money the Australians didn't get.

ELEPHANTS ONE MORNING . September, 1950.

One hot September night I was awakened by the silence.
The endless growl and grind of trucks along First Avenue
was stilled,

I lay sleepy and bewildered but not protesting.

My little daughter Rima called from her crib:

“daddy , what is it ?

Listen, daddy , is it animals ? Is it big animals ?”

Then I heard it:

The steady pounding of giant feet ,

‘Re muffled cries of little men running back and forth.

I had never heard it before, but I knew what it was.

“Come , Rima , let’ s go down and look at the elephants.”

There were hundreds of the great gray beasts pounding
almost silently along,

Stretching up and down First Avenue in the gray dawn
as far as the eye could reach.

Rima and I watched until the last gray hulk vanished
over the hill.

Never again did we go down to First Avenue in the dawn;

Never again did we see the elephants .

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF WHALES

Come! I will tell you about the natural history of whales.

I have observed them with deep curiosity in their native habitat:

The Museum of Natural History in the City of New York.

Whales live in museums.

They hang suspended by wires from the ceiling.

MI day people walk by,

Around and around the balcony,

Around the whale,

And beneath in the courtyard,

Staring up at the whale.

This is how whales live.

Once in a while they have to feed them.

Then they let the wires down.

FRIEDA WAS GENUINELY SHOCKED. August, 1964 .

Frieda gazed around the small, crowded office

Where I and my boss were frantically trying to get out a mailing .

“When do you write poetry? ‘ she asked,

“You’re always working . or rehearsing , or acting . or going
to poetry readings .

When do you write ? ‘ ‘

“Well, ‘ I said, in jesting self-deprecation,

“Sometimes I go to parties . and I sit in a corner,

and when I get bored I write poetry,”
Frieda was genuinely shocked.
“Oh, no, you mustn’t do that.
When you go to a party, and get bored
Go over in a corner and screw;
That way you will avoid boredom.”

HUEY LONG DOING A BALINESE RITUAL DANCE .

(Dedicated to Frank Kuenstler)

Huey tong doing a Balinese ritual dance
Could not perceive the yellow pomegranates slipping into
the blue mailing envelopes;
Little did Henry Ford think that his philanthropic impulses .
Would lead to the proliferation of mad moviemakers ,
spinning their sprockets ,
Yet unable ultimately to find:
Peace of mind
A subway token
Sublimation
a diminished seventh
a really ripe banana
satori.

SOUND OVERHEARD ON FAST FOIJRTH STREET .

September, 1963.

“The bugs in your head are so advanced they have a space program;
They’re going to send one out to orbit around your head -
If they can ever get through the bone .”

SOUND FOUND WRITTEN ON A SUBWAY POSTER AT 191st STREET . February, 1964 .

Your mother is
so fat she has to walk down Wall Street sideways .

Note: The sound is a modern form of folk poetry: It is a brief,
good-humored, epigrammatic insult, often imaginative and
wildly funny. Sometimes kids will swap a dozen or more
sounds, exhausting their repertoire, and then invent new ones.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Yes, I do favor capital punishment,
But for one crime only: tyranny.

OH, LORD

Oh, lord, grace me with
superhuman love,
Let me love even
Montgomery, Alabama

THE TRACINGS HE OBTAINED THAT DAY WERE SIMPLY UNBELIEVABLE .

September, 1959.

Dr. Paul Dudley White was President of the Fourth World
Congress of Cardiology-
Hundreds of heart specialists meeting in Washington . D. C.
To discuss the tetralogy of Fallot and patent ductus arterioles
and the relative merits of the electrocardiogram and the
ballistocardiogram.

Dr. White was an electrocardiogram man himself.

But his great study was the comparative cardiology of the various
species of animal life.

He would personally attach electrodes to the hairy chests of apes,
bears . and polecats,

Getting their electrocardiographic tracings on his tapes,
Poring over them.

Comparing them with the vast library of merely human
electrocardiograms.

Once, with the assistance of a Gloucester whaling captain,

He actually went up to a whale in a rowboat,
landed on it, attached his electrodes.

The tracings he obtained that day were simply unbelievable.

THE TRINITARIAN

I believe in one God in three billion Persons.

I am opposed to the further immolation of any of the Persons
of my God.

NON CREX, SUM

On my own terms I am a Christian;

It is not something I believe, it is something I am.

I do not insist on talking about it,

But I cannot help acting on it.

THE ONLY GOD THERE IS

Where is God ?

Why he is in the divine spark within you,

And that is the only God there is.

THE NATIVE GARB OF INNOCENCE

(After a vision of Swedenborg)
The wisest of the host of angels dwell
Within the inmost, godward, heart of heaven,
Wisest, therefore most innocent, and like
To human children in their visible forms.
Of them all,
Such is the native garb of innocence,
The wisest and most innocent go bare.

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN. June, 1929.
A sudden shower on the mountain top.
Naked, I run through the pine trees
And lift my voice in song.

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THE BARE SKIN OF THE ROCK BEGAN TO SURGE
AND FLOW. August, 1953.
I stood one summer day upon a large bare rock
Looking out over the lake in Central Park.
Half a dozen rowboats were in sight with their loads of sailors
and girls and daddies and small children.
Across the lake three small boys were skinny-dipping
from Bare-As s Rock.
Out of sight behind the trees the steady stream of cars flowed on
almost unheard.
I stood a long time in utter peace looking over the water, then
stared at the rock on which I stood.
The bare skin of the rock began to surge and flow,

First gently pulsating, then stretching in some spots while
other spots contracted,
Then reversing, contracting the stretched spots and expanding
the shrunken ones.
Rhythmically pulsing back and forth; yet my feet felt no vibration
And I realized that what I was seeing
Was nothing more nor less than the pulsation of my own eyeballs.

The Fool in Christ as Anti-HERO

(5 seconds of silent meditation)

I AM IN THE TAO

I am in the Tao
And the Tao is in me
If I would seek the Tao
I must first accept myself.

THE NILGAI. October, 1952 .

It was Rima' s first visit to the Bronx zoo .
My little daughter darted back and forth . delighted by the wide
spaces and many strange animals . Jumping up and down.
I strolled along beside her, carrying a bag of Fritos we were
both munching.
A nilgai came up to the fence near us, staring with her big
brown eyes.
A nilgai is a kind of large Indian antelope, very much like a cow;
In fact, the name nilgai means "blue cow," from Hindi nilgau.
It is not particularly blue.
Rima ran up to the fence and threw in a handful of Fritos.
The nilgai tasted , at first incredulous,
Tasted again, was amazed, then ecstatic.
She finished the corn chips, then came trotting along beside us.
She followed us for a long time.
The path ran along side a large field where all the antelopes
were free to roam at will.
Rima awarded her faithfulness with more handfuls of Fritos.
When we got home we had a new riddle for her mother:
"Why is Rima like a nilgai ?"
The answer, of course ,
"They're both crazy about Fritos."

QUIETLY WE CLIMB THE STAIRS. November, 1949.

Quietly we climb the stairs,
Still as lions,
Still as bears;
Very quietly we come,

Like a circus parade with a big bass drum.
Quietly we climb the stairs,
Still as horses,
Still as mares;
Now the key is in the door
And we tiptoe in like a big wild boar!

THE GREAT TAO .

There is indeed something - yet "thing is not the word -
beyond all else
It is not intelligence, a will, a personality.
It does not write books, nor dictate laws or poems,
Nor does it inspire prophets to proclaim its will.
Still less does it hurl thunderbolts
or thunder damnation to sinners.
It is just the way things are.
Spinoza called it "Nature, sive Deus -
Nature, that is to say, God.
The stoics called it the Logos.
I call it the Tao.
It is not a simple law, like Newton's law of mechanics;
It is exceedingly complex, and subtle and elusive.
Lau-tze well said:
"The way that can be traveled is not the true way:
The word that can be spoken is not the true word."

O FOUNT BANDUSIA...

(Horace , Odes 111, 13)

O fons Bandusiae splendidior vitro
dulci digne mero non sine gloriosus,
eras donaberis haedo
cui froes turgida corneous
primas et venires et proelia dentinal;
frustum: nam gelidly inficiet tibi
rubro sanguine rives
lascivi Bubbles gregis.
te flagrantly atrox hora Caniculae
nescit dangers, tu frigus amative
fesses vomere tsuris
praises et pecori vago.
flea nobelium tu quoque pontius,
me licence caves impositam ilicem
maxis . undo loquaces
nymphal resilient tube.

TRIPPING LIGHT WITH JOYOUS GRACE.

Tripping light with joyous grace;

Fair of mind and fair of face;
Smiling bright by sunlit tree;
I see joy when I see thee!
Anna bright , thy unbound hair
Holds the sunlight in its snare;
It holds the heart within its twine
That sings this artless song of mine.
Love me Anna! I must be
In such bonds more than ever free.
Though the future's turquoise plain
Follow me - and dance again!

WINE AND SNOW. December, 1934.

I stood beside the improvised bar in the Socialist headquarters
on Sullivan Street.
I had rarely tasted strong drink before, but since I did not dance
anyway I was pressed into service as bartender.
Our militant young Socialist hiking club frequently held social affairs
With dancing, drinking, singing revolutionary songs, and even
poetry reading (which I furnished).
With utter inexperience and wine-born assurance I stood by the bar
and mixed drinks.
For those with anti-alcoholic scruples I invented a Gandhi cocktail -
five parts ginger ale, one of grenadine, and a bit of lemon peel.
Finally we were out of wine . and I was sent out into the crisp
white night to find more.
Inside the hall was filled with hot dancing bodies and noise;
Outside a light snow was falling - a thin layer of soft snow
blanketed the streets and frosted my mound of soft blond hair.
No cars were moving . Few people were about.
like me, they moved on silent footsteps.
My head was marvelously light; I felt I was floating , but I could
see footsteps behind me filling with soft silent snow.
Swiftly I skimmed along block after block seeking an open
liquor store.
All too soon I found one.
Lightly and swiftly I skimmed back again, bearing my prize:
Two gallons of dago red.

O fount Bandusia, more than crystal bright,
Spot meet for sweet libations , thou the rustic fane
Of waders sacred to thy guardian nymph,
Tomorrow I with wine thy laughing face will stain.
Red as the shambles of a bloody rite
Claret will flow. The pious bard will pour
Sherry and port for thee, and burgundy:
One drink from every bottle, for himself a scores
O fountain where our fathers sacrificed

I too will strew. for it is custom's rule,
Petal by petal of the August blooms
Upon thy dimpled body in this grotto cool.
The raging of the mg Star harms thee not;
Thou art the refuge of the dusty kine
And weary ox. Flow on, unhurried stream,
Forever unforgotten for this song of mine.

JUST STAND THERE AND IMPERSONATE A CUSTOMER. November, 1934 .

That winter some of my pals in the Torch Club decided to
go into business.

Lou Goldberg, completely hairless in spite of his youth.

Had already worked for two years behind a pushcart
on Orchard Street

Selling shaving cream, condoms, hairpins and other necessities.

Saturnine Matt Josephson was an experienced pitchman.

He used to wander from Miami to Kansas City with his keyster,

Setting up shop on any busy sidewalk free for a few moments
from the law's vigilance.

"I'm not the salesman type." I told them when they approached me,

"What can I do?"

"Don't worry about that," said Matt,

"Just stand there and impersonate a customer.

Handle the merchandise , but gently.

isn't paw over everything.

Don't put the merchandise in a mess.

Make sure your hands are clean.

People will walk right by if no one is looking -

They see a couple of people interested,

Right away there's a crowd.

Walk away every five minutes or so and keep a sharp lookout
for the shamus.

You see him, call out 'slough.'

That's my signal to grab the keyster and hot-foot it
across the street.

That's another precinct. They never bother to follow us over there.

Then we work that side till you spot another shamus.

Md slough back across the street again. 'We sold mufflers - a kind of ornamental neck covering

More or less useful to fill the gap between the chin
and the overcoat -

Selling for just one buck at our cut-rate sidewalk emporium.

It constituted an ideal Christmas gift for males, one size
fitting all necks and all pocketbooks.

We mostly worked Fourteenth Street, near the Salvation Army
and the Armory -

Fewer rival merchants in the stores to keep the cops on our necks.

We catered to wary shoppers from the garment district.

A minor problem was getting the merchandise.

Matt had good connections, though.

He had no trouble getting good seconds
Well worth a buck, practically as good-looking as mufflers
selling in the stores for three or four times the price -
Just as warm, anyway.
One day a plain-clothes dick came along , making his quota.
“All right, this is it, boys.
Pick up your keyster and come along.”
“Don’t give your right name, ‘ Mu cautioned me.
“Don’t annoy the Judge.” Matt warned.
“Don’t plead not guilty. That annoys the hell out of him. He’ ll
find you guilty anyway and throw the book at you.”
We waited about five hours in the lock-up.
clout fifty of us in an iron-barred enclosure about the size
of Mother Rocco’s.
At last I stood before the judge.
“Guilty with an explanation,” I murmured.
After all, I thought, I was not peddling. I was only a shill. There’s
no law against that.
“Never mind the explanation.
Twenty-five dollars or five days.
Sentence suspended.
Now get out of here and I don’t want to see your face again.
Next!”

RIMAS XXI

(Gustave Adolfo Becquer)

Que es poesia? dices mientras clavas
En mi’ pupila tu pupila azul;
Que es poesia? Y tu me lo pregunta?
Poesia... eres tu.

(Translation by Ed Blair, October 1965)

What is poetry? you ask me
Looking straight in my eyes with your eyes of
innocent blue
What is poetry? And you ask it?
Why poetry... is you.
(Version dedicated to Richard Schmidt)

What is poetry asks the face in the mirror
Staring straight into my eyes of innocent blue,
Poetry? Why you should know better than any other
That poetry... is you.

FIFTH AVENUE.

Staggering along Fifth Avenue one July afternoon
I meet Royal Copenhagen ceramic figures at every turn.
Trees are scanty and frail along Fifth Avenue,
Mere saplings in their huge concrete tubs.
In the glorious Thirties the IWW had their headquarters

on Fifth Avenue.
And indeed it plunges down from the Harlem River to find
its natural end in Washington Square.
There let it lie.
If it could plunge through:
Bright bon-bon boxes of high-priced housing would blossom
in the south;
Fur-bearing ladies would pound their heels along the pavements,
leading powder-puff poodles;
Fifth Avenue would shear like a butter-knife through factories,
lofts, and Chinatown;
Finally achieving union with its long-desired objective.
Wall Street.

THAT MAY DAY 50,000 MARCHED. May, 1933 .
That May Day 50,000 marched
Along Fifth Avenue to Union Square
Under the banners of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party
and the unions.
I painted the signs for the Hatter's Union
(Alex Rose paid me handsomely for them.)
There's no need to say much about the slogans - it was in the
worst of the depression; the New Deal had just taken over
from Hoover.
But the sun was shining and the marchers were wearing bright
colors and singing.
The cops along the line of march were smiling and seemed
almost benevolent.
I did not march with the Socialist Party though I was a member;
Instead , I marched with my friend Hans,
The two of us carrying a wide banner:
"The League of Youth for India's Freedom."
With fair skins and high-piled blond hair
We looked like a pair of Swedes.
Hans was a teen-ager, still in knee-pants,
With large head and mild scholarly face.
Along the line of march he handed out leaflets in Hindustani
which he had composed.
We were the only ones in the Gandhist contingent;
All the others were dedicated to some form of proletarian struggle.
We were drawn to the movement by our love for oriental
languages and thought,

But no less by its roots in philosophic anarchism going back to Tolstoy and Thoreau and Mo-Tzu.
We marched along with the Marxists, with them but not of them.
Well, we won, didn't we?
In India.
Here, too, the way of non-violence has spread and deepened
and borne fruit.

FRAGMENT FROM LENAU

Oh wider, wider spread, O storm
And take upon thy pinions vast
The highest star, the lowest worm,
And bring all safely home at last!

STUDENT OF EVOLUTION

Dr. Frances Anne McKittrick said.
"This I would call a most successful group
Of creatures. Here within their little cells
Ten thousand I have gathered from the farthest wilds
Of Greece and Madagascar, Lebanon,
Pakistan and India, Brooklyn, too.
The Greatest Cockroach Collection in the World:
My bugs, quite sociable among themselves.
Live well-adjusted, quiet, useless lives."

AS I EXPECTED, HE SANK LIKE A ROCK. August, 1950 .
Did I ever save a life?
Well, I guess you could call it that.
I was swimming one day in the Bronx River near Hunts Point,
Where it is wide and deep and murky,
Much used by tugboats and fishing boats.
A dozen small boys were swimming near me,
Belly-whopping or jumping feet-foremost from a flat rock.
One boy sat on the rock, struggling to make up his mind.
First he took off his sneakers, then sat and looked at the others.
They shouted and laughed and called to him.
Finally he stood up.
I stood nearby in four feet of water with my toes in the mud
and watched him.
He peeled off dungarees, polo shirt and underwear and at last
Jumped into the water.
As I expected, he sank like a rock.
I reached over, picked him up, and set him back on the large
flat rock.
He sat there, shivering and scared, but undamaged.
"Golly, mister, you saved my life." he gasped.
I smiled and swam away.

GRAFFITI IN THE HOTH ST. 1RT STATION.

May 10, 1964.

Equality! Picket the zoo!

Turn on for Peace!

God is dead – Nietzsche

Nietzsche is dead – God

God and Nietzsche are both dead.

–Melvin Carnowsky

When the light blue sky came to

light in the electric light

I gave it a light blow with

a light sledghammer.

–Morris Swados

SOME QUESTIONS I CAN'T ANSWER. October, 1927.

“Ed guess how many,” said the
scoutmaster’s wife, holding out a
fistful of pennies.

Some questions I can answer right away
without effort.

“63” I said.

“Why, Ed, how did you know?” she cried.

Some questions I cannot answer.

I LIKE A LITTLE ANARCHY WITH MY MUSIC. June, 1926.

Walking alone one summer night on a Georgia road

I heard twenty frogs of assorted sizes weaving a black litany
of polyrhythms

With a tone row unreachable by any orchestra.

I like a little anarchy with my music:

My raucous, reedy whistle joined them,

Weaving through the jungle of harmony and dissonance.

THE, OF, AND, TO, A, IN, THAT, IT, IS. I

The, of, and, to, a, in, that, it, is, I:

The, 7, 310,

Of, far behind with 3,998

Occurrences within a hundred thousand running words

Of reasonably modern English.

Dr. Godfrey Dewey found

Recurrences of just ten words

Make up 25% of all we write and say.

These are the ten:

The, of, and, to, a, in, that, it, is, I.

WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE BIG BLACKOUT? August 13, 1966.

Recently the population explosion hit local hospitals

Zooming 3 or 400 percent overnight.

“What happened?” asked hospital administrators.

They counted back 9 months.

November 9, 1965. What happened? The big power failure
and blackout.

After all, most people managed to get home

And there was no television available to amuse them.

At latest reports the birth rate is leveling off to normal again.

WHILE THERE WAS SILENCE I STROLLED ON. September, 1927.

It was a warm September night in Georgia.

All alone I walked eleven miles from town.

I saw the fireflies in the hills.

Silently shining and dimming and appearing again
in the tangle of branches.

I breathed deeper and deeper, my blood began to tingle.

“How would be it,” I thought,

“If I put my feet down an inch above the road,
instead of on the road?”

I tried it.

I walked along for twenty yards an inch above the road;

Then I stepped higher and higher.

Soon I was above the bushes looking down at the fireflies

While the lights flashed on silently beneath me.

While there was silence I strolled on,

Twelve feet above the road and the creek and the fiends.

At last I came to my house.

I stepped through my open window,

Sank into my bed

And fell asleep.

Thereafter many times I walked on air

But always and only in the silent night.

Once I walked across flood-swollen Chattanooga Creek,

Three miles from hill to hill,

Guided by rows of half-submerged telephone poles
beside the sunken roads.

I strolled in the air, my blood a-tingle,

Breathing life from the warm, silent night.

FACES ARE BLUE

(Inspired by the murals in Mother Rocco's)

Faces are blue.

All faces ?

At least six!

At least eight!
Brooding , aetheric, maternal, scholarly -
Some blue, and blue, and blue - all blue!
Others with splashes of red
Accenting their blue desolation.
Some with a field of desert tan,
Yet blue - all blue.
Faces are blue.

MIDNIGHT ON A GEORGIA ROAD. September, 1927.
Bone-weary one warm September night
I stepped off the Chattanooga–Rossville trolley.
Midnight. No more cars would run.
I was 18, a student at Chattanooga High.
I had just wound up five hours typing at the Chattanooga Times
Writing my weekly column, High School News.
Proud but weary – mostly weary
I dozed intermittently during the eight-mile street car trip.
End of the line.
Only two more miles and home.
I would take a long drink of milk,
Shuck off my clothes.
Stretch out and rest my bones.
A car pulls up besides me.
Perhaps a neighbor offering a lift?
No.
A blue uniform.
A hard right to my cheek and a left to my jaw.
A strong reek of whisky breath.
“Whaddye think you’re doing out here
Raisin’ hell on the public road at midnight?
Ye’r drunk and disorderly.
Yes, drunk and disorderly.
I’m running you in.
Git in the car.
That’ll learn you to raise hell when decent people are asleep.”
As always, I stood apart within myself
And watched curious at what was happening to me.
Oh yes, I have heard about these things.
I spent the rest of the night in a smelly can of a jail,
Not in meditation, however,
But in singing ribald songs with my cellmates,
Two old-timers, drunk as the cop, but rational and good company.
Morning came. The turnkey let me go.
I staggered home, more amused than resentful.

OU SONT LES NIEGES?
God does not give a damn;

He has no damns to give.
Who really expects to find hell
Under the Mohorovicic discontinuity?

VERMONT IS A BOWLFUL OF CLOUD

Vermont is a bowlful of cloud,
Smooth and level in the valley between two nearby mountains.
A white and creamy bowlful early in the morning
Then, as the sun rises higher, melting away.

WHEN I GET TO HEAVEN. June, 1927.

That summer I was free as a wandering bird.
To avoid being lynched I had dropped out of high school.
(I had tried to organize an atheist club the winter before).
I left home and was living by myself in a room over
a hardware store.
It cost me five dollars a month
Which I paid easily from my earnings working two or three
days a week in the brewery.
I didn't devote too much of my time to working.
Sometimes I camped out in the mountains for weeks at a time.
I visited every lake and pond around Chattanooga,
And traced the course of every stream
And swam in most of them.
I explored every swamp, every hill and mountain
And, of course, I explored the streets -
North Chattanooga . East Chattanooga , Orchard Hill,
St. Elmo , East take -
Even Goose Hollow , where a11 the children were bastards
and all the girls were whores.
There were no old people in Goose Hollow -
they didn't live that long.
Ninth Avenue was the commercial center of the Negro section.
Many of my Jewish friends had stores there.
Wandering one day along Ninth Avenue
I heard the sound of singing and turned the corner.
A small crowd had gathered around an old blind preacher -
A tiny, shriveled-up , white-haired Negro man.
He looked inexpressibly old and weary; his voice was
weary but earnest.
A little boy was with him to serve as his eyes.
The boy played the tambourine during the singing,
and later passed it around for coins.
I liked what I was hearing, so I dropped in half a dollar -
Most of my personal fortune at the time.
I have never heard that song again or read it in a book.
Here is what that weary earnest voice sang:
When I get to heaven gonna sing always -

Sing always - Sing always -
When I get to heaven donna sing always;
I hanna go to heaven when I die.
When I get to heaven donna pray always -
Pray always - Pray always -
When I get to heaven donna pray always;
I hanna go to heaven when I die.
When I get to heaven donna dance always -
Dance always - Dance always -
When I get to heaven donna dance always;
I hanna go to heaven when I die.
When I get to heaven donna preach always -
Preach always - Preach always -
When I get to heaven donna preach always;
I wanna go to heaven when I die.

MY GRANDFATHER.

(by Richard Blair)

My grandfather ran a medicine show
In the days of Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson
Traveling from Indiana to Florida and from Georgia to Arkansas
With minstrels and monkeys and performing dogs.
He would use the show to attract a crowd. then lecture on the
merits of Blair' s Electric Wonder Soap Salve
Giving a practical demonstration by curing headaches on the spot,
as well as other assorted aches , internal and external, all
the way down to the toes.
He cooked the stuff up himself. The principal ingredient was
Ivory Soap.
My other grandfather was a rabbi.

SYLLABUB

Cream and port wine
Cinnamon and sugar
Nutmeg and mace
Syllabub is what people used to eat
before they had Jello.

SIGNS OF HOPE.

Modern man is clothed in drab discomfort
But yesterday I saw a child who could have stepped out of
the Twelfth Century
Gaily pumping a three-wheeler in Washington Square.

I COULD FLOAT, BUT I DO NOT WISH TO ALARM HER. August , 1922

It is a warm August afternoon.

Slowly a white pony climbs the path up lookout Mountain,
Overhung with green leaves,
Beside clear, sparkling Flintstone Creek.
It is not me astride the pony,
Oh no, it is a sweet , skinny , freckled-faced daughter
of the mountains,
Clad in white cotton shirt and faded blue jeans,
Her face and bare feet well tanned,
Her hair bleached almost white by the sun.
I walk along beside her, my feet hardly touching the ground.
I could float, but I do not wish to alarm her.
The pony stops beside a quiet pool.
The sun is hot. I run down to the pool, shedding my clothes.
The cool water slides over my bare skin.
I beckon to her. She hesitates only a moment,
Then peels and is splashing beside me.
The white of her skin is shaped like a bathing suit,
Whiter than the pony -
Prettier, too.

ONCE IN HIS VARIED CAREER. Atlanta, March, 1914.

Once in his varied career
My father was a wandering photographer.
He had a wooden box mounted on a tripod, with a folding
accordion arrangement in front.
In the back a big black c10th covered his head as he fiddled
with the lenses.
A small, shaggy white pony accompanied him on his wanderings ,
Not to ride himself, of course,
But as a sure-fire attraction for small children.
I sat on the pony and squinted at the sun while my father
performed his mysterious rites under the black c10th.
At last a small square of tin emerged which he promptly threw
into a bath of chemicals.
After a few minutes the picture was quite clear and dry.
He handed it to me.
I treasured it for a long time.
Unfortunately the image faded away with the years.

COMPLETELY BEWILDERED I CLOSED THE BOOK
AND WALKED BACK TO THE OFFICE. November, 1963.

It was a pleasant, sunny day
I lunched as usual at the New Way Luncheonette
on Waverly Place
Strolled over to Washington Square
Sat on a bench and read the comics
Then started back to where I worked.
On University Place I stopped in front of a book

store and idly paged through the 35 cent books.
A Negro man, middle aged, almost in tears, came
out of the store and spoke to me.
“Now what do you think of Dallas? Now what do you
think of the South?”
“Why, I’m a southerner, “I said, “Today no more,
no less.”
“Murderers , all murderers, murderers, “he cried.
Completely bewildered, I closed the book and walked
back to the office.

OH WHAT A PEACEFUL TRANQUIL LIFE
Oh what a peaceful tranquil life
Is his who flees the ways of earthly strife
And seeks the solitary way unseen
Of those few wise men who in the world have been.

DOGS. Atlanta, August. 1917.
Once I owned a dozen dogs –
Perhaps I should not say “owned” for they were their own
dogs who came of their own accord,
And went their way when they pleased.
Still, they were mine and I was theirs, and we played
together in joy and friendship
In my backyard, and in the long ash-can alley behind
Lucky Street,
And in the fields and woods around Georgia Tech.

I CANNOT SPEAK AGAINST THE WHEELS OF PROGRESS.
October, 1912.
“I feel like a bull moose” Teddy shouted,
Standing on the stone steps of the First Methodist Ghurch in
Rossville, Georgia.
I stood there, a cotton-headed little boy
Holding to his sister’ s hand on the outskirts of the crowd
Listening to the campaign speech repeated at hundreds of
whistle stops across the nation
But still lustily relished by the speaker.
The entire population of Rossville, some 800, stood around
Gazing open-lawed at the man who openly called himself
a Republican,
But talked like a regular old wool-hat, red-gallused Populist,
one of their own,
Lambasting crooks in high places, the Wall Street money
barons, and the beef barons and the railroad barons.
Just then a bull locomotive let out a hoot
And a freight train lumbered across the road at the diagonal

crossing one hundred yards away.
Teddy glared at it, then turned back to the crowd and flashed
his toothy grin.
Held up his hands to still the mob, then roared,
“I cannot speak against the wheels of progress.”

TIME TRACKS

I had a very happy childhood:
I was alone most of the time,
and I was very good company.

IT DID NOT OCCUR TO ME THAT THIS WAS ANYTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY AS FISHING EXPEDITIONS GO. Atlanta, May, 1912.

Ted came for us early that morning.
Because it was my third birthday they had agreed to let me go along.
I had a quick breakfast of ice-cold milk and Aunt Em's layer cake
Covered with sweet white icing and fuzzy coconut.
We all piled into Ted's jalopy.
Five miles through rocky roads lined with cottonwoods and we
arrived at the river.
Ted had an old rowboat tied up at the bank of the Chattahoochee
At the end of a sandy path winding through blackberry bushes.
We all got into the rowboat – my cousins Bud and George and
their friends Ted and Carl.
It was still early morning. There was a mist over the river.
We rowed out to the center of the Chattahoochee and settled
down to the serious business of the day – the catching
of catfish.
Slowly the boat filled with catfish and the thick chocolate
water of the Chattahoochee.
Slowly the sun rose higher and slowly the boat settled deeper
and deeper into the water.
Ted was landing a catfish when he noticed the water about two
inches from the gunwales .
“Hey, look at that,” he yelled, and dumped out his can of worms
into the Chattahoochee, then started furiously bailing out
the river from the rowboat with the little Campbell's soup can.
Bud was seated closest to the bucket. He emptied the catfish
into the bottom of the boat and started bailing out water.
George grabbed the oars and headed for shore.
Ted, Carl and Bud bailed away but the boat sank deeper and deeper.
I sat alone on the prow of the boat, unmoved in the midst of
the commotion.
It did not occur to me to be afraid.
It did not occur to me that this was anything out of the ordinary
as fishing excursions go.
We reached the bank just as the waves lapped over the gunnels.
George jumped ashore, grabbing me as he leaped.

It never occurred to me to get excited.
I enjoyed the fried catfish that night, served with hot cornbread
and gravy and roasting ears.

I WAS GLAD WHEN MY TOES TOUCHED THE MUD OF
NORTH CHATTANOOGA. May, 1927.

It is not much of a feat to swim the Tennessee River -
Not more than half a mile at the Market Street Bridge
in Chattanooga.

Still, I just wanted to do it.

I had just learned to swim that month,
Carefully teaching myself from the diagrams in the
Boy Scout Handbook.

I always swam bare, of course -

I didn't even own a bathing suit.

I had already swum Lula lake , reputed to be bottomless,

(That very place is where I learned to swim)

Swift , clear little Flintstone Creek on the mountain,
and slow , swampy Chattanooga Creek.

And the Chicamauga , River of Blood to the Cherokees,
Deeply tinged with the red mud of North Georgia.

I hiked many miles north and east and south of Chattanooga,

Swimming everywhere but the public swimming pools,

Wherever I could be completely free in the water and air
and the sunshine.

Lord, I do it yet.

I had two good friends who lived in a shack by the river -

Lean, soft- spoken old timers,

Fishermen, proud members of the IWW.

I told them about my plan. Straightway they agreed.

I left my clothes in the shack, ran down the bank,
and plunged in the river.

I stood with my toes in the mud while Tom Parsons got in his boat.

I struck out straight for the yonder shore.

.Tom lazily paddled alongside in the rowboat.

A hundred yards out I rolled over on my back -

Rested and paddled, rested and paddled.

My slow progress northward became infinitesimal.

Then rolled over again, struck out again.

Tom lazed along , rowing beside me.

There were no AAU records broken that afternoon.

Swimming and resting . resting and swimming again.

It was a warm May afternoon

- My birthday by the way -

Summer already in Chattanooga,

But there was still a chill in the water .

I was glad when my toes touched the mud of North Chattanooga .

I climbed in the boat.

Much faster now, Tom rowed back.

Jim Houston was waiting for us
With fried catfish . pork and beans . hot coffee.
I stayed until the night and we talked about Gene Debs,
and Joe Hill, and T-Bone Slim,
And we sang the good old rowdy wobbly songs.

I'LL NEVER BE WITHOUT ONE AGAIN. August, 1960.

Sunning myself one day on a half-disintegrated pier
I saw two bums trying to open a beer bottle.
They approached me and offered me a drink but I had no opener
I'll never be without one again.

I WAS CONTENT TO STAND ALONE. September, 1911.
All right, let's start at the beginning.
Here it is... the deepest memory I can pull out of the box,
I remember –vaguely the Allen family
They had a small house and many children
A front porch with leaves and grass around it
Facing a rocky macadam street
I stood on the porch, barefoot, holding a peanut butter sandwich
I liked peanut butter sandwiches – still do –
There were many other children on the porch
Some of them quite noisy.
These were the Allen children. Some of them had running noses.
Perhaps they had peanut butter sandwiches too.
They did not bother me , but I did not belong to them.
I was content to stand alone and enjoy what this family –
not mine– so mysteriously provided.

A WAY, WAYS, AND THE WAY.
Because I have always gone my own sweet way,
And would that you would go your own sweet way:
Therefore I cry, "Behold, the way is one."

HUGH EDWARD BLAIR
May 23, 1909- January 28, 1967

My husband, Ed, hitchhiked to New York from Georgia during the depression of the 30s. We met at a gathering at the Socialist Party headquarters, in the Village, where he lived while he was jobless and broke. Shy, but always smiling, Ed talked very little about himself. He had been a lonely child who spent most of his time reading in libraries. He was both a little savant and a little monster in the lower grades because he could give a scholarly dissertation on Marlow and his contemporaries at the tender age of ten.

Ed earned a degree at City College, and undertook graduate studies, but to a very large extent he was self-taught. He was an insatiable reader with a photographic memory and a great curiosity about everything. He continued throughout his life to acquire immense stores of knowledge which he understood in depth in such diverse fields as comparative religion, the arts, animals, Western and Eastern music, Eastern philosophy, almost any science one could name and even shorthand systems. Linguistics fascinated him and he was considered an authority on artificial languages. He was proud to be one of the framers of Interlingua, an international language that, because it is easily learned, facilitates communication between scientists of different nationalities and tongues. He translated much scientific material into Interlingua and worked for some twenty-five years with the International Auxiliary Language Association, the organization that structured it.

Linguistics and family left little time for the writing of poetry, acting in plays, and music, cherished interests of his youth. He had no training but would improvise on the piano by the hour. As a youngster Ed paid for a correspondence course in organ music. He had wanted to buy an organ as well and after much dickering and many letters, the fee for both organ and lessons was reduced from \$240 to \$47. The aunt with whom he lived at the time flatly refused to have the organ in the house. Ed's minister agreed to keep it in the church, but neither the lessons nor the organ materialized. The fiasco did not diminish his love of music. Ed was lured back to acting in 1961 when on impulse he auditioned for a role in "The Second Shepherd's Play" translated from the Middle-English by Bob Nichols, and was accepted. Amateur though he was, he performed with delight and gusto in this and other plays at the Judson Memorial Church and elsewhere.

In 1964 Ed began to conduct poetry readings at the Gansevoort Pier on the Hudson River, and indoors during the winter. Ed was delighted to read his own poems and to sing old songs such as "John Riley", "Billy Boy", "Little Mohee" and labor songs, especially IWW songs, at these gatherings. He enjoyed the company of poets and the warmth and admiration in which they held him. He was inspired to write and almost all of the poems in this book were written during his association with the Gansevoort Pier Poets who continue to meet regularly. There was not time for all Ed's interests, the years he lived were too few for him, for me and his children. When our daughter Rima and our son Richard were little, he was an exuberant companion to them, able to share the imaginative world of childhood as few adults can. The nocturnal procession of elephants on a city street, described in one of his poems, stirred him as much as it did Rima. His poem about whales took root in Richard's reflections during a visit to the Museum of Natural History. We still hoard the stunning bats and owls Ed fashioned of colored paper for a Halloween party. He was given to gay talk with children and they learned effortlessly from him because he impaled knowledge as if it were both riddle and joke.

Ed was a large man physically, and enormously large in spirit.

He was earthy and wise , erudite and fun-loving, non-conformist and tolerant, kind and gentle . It was a privilege to know him, and to be loved by him.

ANN BLAIR

May, 1968

ED BLAIR - POEMS

This book of poems is a bouquet, of mostly wild flowers. It is also an autobiography, as sweetly limned as the breeze blowing over a field. And it is more: a proposition of thought mysteriously plain, obvious yet in accessible. As he remarks himself quoting from Lao Tze, “the word that can be spoken is not the true word”. There is an extraordinary range in this small collection of poems. He tells of his own boyhood, in “I Was Glad When My Toes Touched the Mud of the North Chattanooga”, and of the anarchist socialist depression days in New York in the 30s. There are political and topical poems. There are romances, as the one with the characteristic line: “The white of her skin is shaped like a bathing suit” and the fine lyric: “Love me. Anna.” There are poems of scientific, medical, abstract and linguistic curiosity.

Ed was a gifted translator (from Latin , Italian, medieval French and Spanish). His larger repertoire was of old songs and ballads, bits of Americana like Robert W. Service’s poems, reminiscences and Wobbly portraits, as the one of “T-Bone Slim”. In this brawling New York he made no claims for himself. He had a wonderful performer’s presence. A great bulk of a man, open as a sunflower, with a bashful courtesy; his voice carried through the air, and when he sang or recited everybody smiled.

What is the special quality of Ed Blair? First of all he sees things willingly through a child’s eye - and often writes about children. He is unfailingly generous and non-judging - even after spending the night in the Georgia jail, thrown in by the drunken cop. He is humorous but unsentimental. The poems are uncompromisingly evanescent: about a particular named person, a particular situation. And he is always directly and lovingly connected, as with the 12 dogs who “Went their way when they pleased/still, they were mine and I was theirs”.

As far as I know, Ed Blair didn’t write much poetry until he was around 45 or 50 years old. That in itself is unusual. It leaves the essence of the poet unobliterated by literature. And if he was a Sage, he never in his life posed as one. Yet he must have known pretty accurately what he was doing. Consider the poem which begins: “Once in his varied career my father was a wandering photographer”. How successfully this describes time past and passing. And the poem about being taken by relatives on a cat-fishing expedition: the leaky boat gradually fills to the gunwale with the wakers of the Chattahoochee, leaving the three year old

on the bow dry, and noticing nothing unusual. I can see his mild philosophical smile then, and I can see it fifty years later as we knew him. A life gone by - lost, lost, and loving, loving - and expressed accurately in these few poems .

ROBERT NICHOLS

New York City, 1968

A Way, Ways and The Way

After All She Could Always Find Something to Yell About

As I Expected, He Sank like a Rock

Bottle Babies

Bratsvo

Capital Punishment

Completely Bewildered I Closed the Book and Walked Back to the Office

Dixit Sanctus Augustinus In Confessiones Suas

Dogs

Duet in a Magic Playground

Dynamics

Elephants One Morning

Faces Are Blue

Fifth Avenue

Fragment of Lenau

Frieda Was Genuinely Shocked

God Our Brother

Graffiti in the 110th St. IRT Station

Huey Long Doing a Balinese Ritual Dance

I Am in The Tao

I Cannot Speak Against the Wheels of Progress

I Could Float, But I Do Not Wish to Alarm Her

I Like a Little Anarchy With My Music

I Was Content to Stand Alone

I Was Glad When My Toes Touched the Mud of

North Chattanooga

I'll Never Be Without One Again

It Did Not Occur to Me That This Was Anything Out of the Ordinary as Fishing Expeditions Go

Just Stand There and Impersonate a Customer

Lookout Mountain

Midnight On a Georgia Road

My Grandfather

Non Credo Sum

O Fount Bandusia

Oh, Lord

Oh What a Peaceful Tranquil Life

Once in His Varied Career

Ou Sont Les Nieges?

Quietly We Climb the Stats

Rimas XXI

Signs of Hope

Some Questions I Can't Answer
Sound Found Written on a Subway Poster at 191st Street
Sound Overheard on East Fourth Street
Student of Evolution
Syllabus
That May Day 50, 000 Marched
The Bare Skin of the Rock Began to Surge and Flow
The Fool in Christ as Anti-Hero
The Great Tao
The Human All Too Human News
The Native Garb of Innocence
The Natural History of Whales
The Nilgai
The, Of, And, To, A, In, That, It, Is, I
The Only God There Is
The Tracings He Obtained That Day Were
Simply Unbelievable
The Trinitarian
Time Tracks
Tripping Light With Joyous Grace
Vermont is a Bowlful of Gould
What Did You Do in the Big Blackout?
What is Poetry?
When I Get to Heaven
While There Was Silence I Strolled On
Wine and Snow