

Blue Sky in Buckets



Poems of 1990

by Alan Harris

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The blue sky comes all the way down to the ground.

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Blue Sky in Buckets

I asked the blue sky today
why people suffer.
It must not have known,
for it just stayed blue.

I asked my friend
why people suffer.
He said because they try
to stuff the blue sky
into their little buckets
and fail.

But the blue sky comes all
the way down to the ground.
It fills every bucket that's not full
of something else already.

So how do we not suffer?
Just dump out our buckets
and breathe easy.
No stuffing necessary.

Commuter Queries the Sun

My trusty train
hauls me orangeward
from this 5 o'clock
plastic city into
an on-time sunset.

Fried-egg friend,
over easy
in the wispy west,
innerly whisper me
what you are.
A star?
Yes, but are
you a you
or merely a major it?

May I commune
with you in
the hollow of
my heart?
Dissolve shallow
knowledge?
Understand you?

Humbly may I harvest
your richer spectrum
than my life
in the office
offers?

If I knew you,
would I be you?
To reach your light
must I groan with long
effort and escalation?
Or simply relax with
easy exhalation?

Unanswering,
you fold
the shimmering cloudy
whites around your
blazing yolk and
drop away.

Breath of good night
is felt below
my horizon.

Suddenly I see
you shooting aloft
for thirty seconds
a brilliant vertical
shaft of orange
as if to acknowledge
we know we know
each other.

My train trundles on.

Stray

As I gaze nightward at our
volunteer chandelier of stars
light-years away (each point
a twinkly memory of a light that was),

a white tomcat approaches me
like an old friend and brushes
my pantleg, crying up from the snow
as if in hungry agony.

I fetch some dry cat food,
pour it into a Styrofoam tray
on my porch, and watch him
dine with great crunching.

My eyes in the blazing sky again,
I drink measureless ancient light
into my emptiness as a gift
from the magnificent All-of-it.

Is our future in the stars?
I laugh aloud into the night air,
feeling the moment so mightily
I care little for any answer.

The speckled black overhead ocean
absorbs my laugh with dignity
while the white stray, finished with his meal,
wipes his chin on my pantleg.

A universe above and a cat below
circumscribe my being in this
delicate wintry instant—
love coming from both ways.

To My Wife

Your glance is beautiful
when I muster the calm
courage to look you
in the eye.

Your voice sounds
like a symphony
when I listen to all
of its overtones.

Your heart sings
like a canary in a
cage, heedless of
supposed captivity.

You light a candle
behind my eyes
which illuminates
my gloomy mind.

Together we plunge
down this life's waterfall,
two drops on our
way to the sea.

We will not forget
these days nor want to.
Our love has no relation
to time or place. We love.

Saturday Walk

I am nothing. I walk my
fleshy shell along the street,
seeing the squirrels at play and
hearing the early spring birds.

No, I am not invisible yet.
This body has size and mass
and cruises well on automatic pilot.
Any bird that cares can see me.

But the breeze whistles in my ears
as if I were hollow, and that's how
I feel—ecstatically hollow—
here for now, but empty of place.

I am the neighborhood today—
I am the sidewalk, the bare but
budding trees. I am the children
on bicycles and skateboards.

No iota in me stops
or diverts the fresh flowing of life.
The sun shines straight through me,
and I like the cool feeling inside.

Monday in the office
I will be something again.
I will have a title and a salary
and a desk and a boss.

Mondays must perhaps be.
Deadlines, crises,
meetings, phone calls—
all these may have their place.

But walking now outdoors,
I drift along free and empty.
Nothing can touch me
when I am nothing.

To My Body

Dear dundering
obedient blob that
I have lived through
these 45 years,
have I ridden
in you
or have you ridden
on me?

No Solomon could
ever distinguish us—
your actions me,
your pains me,
and you me—
but I somehow not you.

There will be
a sacred day
when you fold
your way into
the earth
as I slip freely
into the air
as much alive
as you dead.

I thank you deeply
from inside
for long service
as my antenna
into a tragic
comedy program
I almost dare
enjoy.

Library

Books of mine,
silent friends
on the shelves,
rows and rows of
spines erect,
ready for reception.

Plodding through
the pages of these friends,
will I find any life?
Any electricity?

I find concepts
built upon concepts
built upon concepts,
traded and stolen and
borrowed and twisted
from one to another
until the cows
drink milk shakes.

My friends in rows are
corpses in a mental
mausoleum.
I wish them well
in their neat slots,
but I must live awake
and alive and alert
and aware.

Thank you, my friends,
for the memories,
but mother moment
jerks me to attention.
I will sing the now
into the here
until I join you
upon the shelves.

Letting Go

March rattling the windows
and thoughts buzzing in my brain
keep me from dropping into
a Sunday afternoon nap.

Outside, the musical moans
of swaying trees rise and fall,
and a persistent branch
rubs on the shingles above.

Sinking now in spite of the noise,
I drift down through my senses
toward the silky bliss
that beckons below.

Just at the point of falling free,
I hear a windy crescendo
play catchy rhythms
on the window panes again.

Allow me my nap, dear windows.
I am swaying with the trees.
Let me fall into the source.
Let me fall....

River Pair

We spend a few sunlit minutes by the river
between wafting willows above
and the sea-bound twinkling current below,
watching two ducks quack and dive for food.

We have learned to be quiet,
letting the silent breeze of love
sway us together in spirit
like these oscillating cattails near the bank.

Younger, we captured each other swimming
in a marriageward current of living water,
not knowing quite who we were
nor where we were bound.

Older, we have danced a lively jig,
stubbed a toe, raised a child,
blindly hurt each other,
healed each other's wounds.

As we sit here and mirror the present
to each other in quaint communion,
gazing at two ducks gliding downstream,
there is nothing at all to say or do.

Humid Evening

I finger gently the meshy steel diagonals
in our manufactured backyard fence
as lightning bugs dazzle a slow-dance
in the swimmy summer-wet air.

The therapeutic pendulum of a breeze-driven
willow branch entrances me, and merely glancing
at our telephone pole mutely poking into the yellow
setting sky flares a human fragrance in me.

Grasp me by the arm and try to feel
my feelings if you can, as flimsy and confused
as the evening sounds reflecting about our
house and joining the silence of grass.

Praise the Lord of Emptiness as evening's first
star suggests its way through the stratosphere,
retinas all over the city tickling with its improbable
light. Breathe the whole slippery sky with me.

Kings have died failing to acquire a splinter of our
well-being. Look at the grass and the fireflies and the
fence, all swimming in a soup of quaintly offered
love from some source unknown despite knowers.

The Child

Hello, little man, what are you doing here?

I just want to have a part in your life.

What would you like to do?

I would like to play and laugh.

How would you propose we do that?

Just throw everything up in the air sometimes, and let it all go.

No, we can't do that. It wouldn't be respectable.

Well, I want to play, and you won't let me.

OK, then, let yourself play a little. I'll look the other way.

I'll play over here in the corner with my sand toys.

Who are you? Why are you in here wanting to play?

I'm just somebody who is here like you are. We're here together.

Would you like to ride on my shoulders?

Yes, that would be fun.

OK, up you go.

Now we're really high, aren't we? I like this.

You have to sit still. I can't hold you if you're wiggling around.

Wow! This is fun. Why don't we do this all day?

I might get tired. Besides, what would people say if I had you all day?

They might say you were having fun.

Yes, this is kind of fun. Let's do this some more.

Now you can put me down. That's enough fun.

Who are you? You look familiar.

I am you before you got respectable.

Hot Date or Soul Mate?

Your gaze
Betrays
Your dip
Of lip.

I know
The flow
Of thought
You've bought.

Your eye
Won't lie.
Confined
Behind

Your mask,
You ask,
"Won't you
Be true?"

Nor I
Will lie—
I'm true
With you.

Through the Center

In the humid stillness
of this August afternoon
I watch a spider spinning its web
in the ceiling corner above
what some may call my deathbed.

Is there a faint whisper?
I hold my breath to hear it.
No, no sound at all—
a silent eight-legged dance
on the wallpaper border,
a twirling in air,
a catching on a thought.

Share the secret
of your web's design with me,
fellow spinner in space,
and I'll reveal it to mankind
in homely phrases,
given a few more days on earth.
Fill me with your simple wisdom
as I lay complexities aside.

What is this long-lost feeling?
As your web takes flimsy form,
my room grows dim, then dark—
this air will not be breathed.
Some force is kindly lifting me
to your delicate ceiling circle
that I may venture through the center
toward our one and only Light.

Doing What One Can Do

Mostly the world thumps as it revolves,
like a tire about to blow out bigtime.
Some little place on earth has an owie
that nobody will kiss, an owie that throbs and stinks.
Will someone please kiss the latest wars?
Just a couple of smackers to make them feel better?

Would you, YOU, kiss something that rancid?
Or will you just ride along in your body,
reading your newspaper and saying "I'll be darned"?

This world needs a gigantic, resounding kiss
that will echo down the centuries as the turning point
at which mankind dropped its murderous mind
and gave and loved and gave and loved some more.

My lips are pursed to give this kiss, but where
should it be administered?
Where is the world, indeed?
Where is mankind?
These easy questions are as profound as Zen.

My heart wells up with unconditional love
to heal and cure and save and mend,
but there's no world to kiss, no mankind.
Ignorant of my good intentions and holy purpose,
the world goes on thumping like a terrible tire while
I and a million other do-gooders fail to kiss its lump.

"Let the world be the lopsided world," my head whispers to me.
"The world chooses perfectly what is needed for its growth,
and so do all the people who are in the world."

But letting what is be what is is too wrenching for my heart.
Call me whatever you wish—
I now plant this giant smacker in the air
so that Earth and I may groove aright among the silences.

Ride

Commuter train bears
between the wavy irons
most precious cargo.

Passengers talking,
sleeping, reading newspapers,
eighty miles per hour.

Unique life stories
glowing within these bodies
filing toward sunset.

Parting Words

I soon must leave this earth.
What would you ask
of me, young man?

How shall I live my own life,
oh dying man?

Live so that you energize
each day. Give some small gift
to humanity every day.
Love the child within you
every day.

What is your way
of finding truth,
oh dying man?

Truth is seen, not found.
You may see truth in the center
of your head as pictures
on a screen.
Truth is not the pictures,
but truth is in the seeing.
Be wary of
memory pictures,
for they fade and distort.
And observe the impermanence
of hopes and fears,
which rise and fall
like waves on an inner sea.
To see truth,
just look—now,
now,
now.

What should I know
about love,
oh dying man?

Love, as a word,
has been to the heights
and the depths,
so trouble yourself little
over knowing the word.
If you know the beauty
of a blooming daffodil,
the magic in a young
woman's gaze, the thrill
of seeing your first child,
then you know love.
If you give a gift to someone,
then you love—
not the gift
you buy at a store
and wrap,
but a living gift of sharing,
of nurturing
when most needed.

May God bless you,
oh dying man.

I now must depart,
but I shall see you again
through other eyes.



About Alan Harris

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

