

Fireflies Don't Bite



Poems of 2002

by Alan Harris

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**Both harmlessness and light?
I bow to you, Saint Bug.**

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Noon Out of Nowhere:
Collected Poems of Alan Harris
www.alharris.com/poems

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The Water

You cry your first in your mother's arms.
The water trickles down the drain.

You soon grow into a toddler's knowing.
The water flows beneath the streets.

You attend your schools for diplomas, degrees.
The water enters a nearby stream.

You have your wedding, children, career.
The water joins a seaward-flowing river.

You make mistakes in ethics; health goes weak.
The water reaches the peace of the sea.

You retire from your career to savor life.
The water now is one with all the seas.

You suffer through precursors of mortality.
The water feels a need to rise.

Your body quits, and you leave it where it is.
The water rises through a mist into a cloud.

You enjoy long bliss in the space of Light.
The water joins a darkening cloud.

You feel a longing toward the physical again.
The water rains down and seeps into a well.

Your vision of the Light has faded now.
The water is drawn from the well for drinking.

You feel confined and utterly doomed.
The water breaks.

You cry your first in your mother's arms.
The water trickles down the drain.

January Adagio

Tonight at 10:30 I went out
for my walk. In the distance
I heard a major commotion
of geese. At first I thought
a flock might fly overhead,
though the hour was far too late
for geese to be aloft.

But the sound wasn't moving.

I heard a train's rumble,
then its mournful horn.
A freight was crossing
the railroad bridge
over the Fox River
close to where the geese
were overnighing.

As I turned around toward home
I still could hear them fret and scold
in chaotic counterpoint with
the diesel's basso continuo.

And the stars tonight burned
bright holes in the sky, decorating
bare tree branches overhead
like lingering holiday lighting.

After the train had rumbled off
to where nocturnal trains all go,
the neighborhood assumed a hush
perturbed only by my footsteps.

Hardly anything is quieter
than distant sleeping geese
and star-bespeckled trees.

A Meditation

In the where of almost
lies more somejoy
than define inchly gives.

Streamtake and heartgive
are so many too softness
for headly grasp to box.

If seldom all many center
in one boundless allitude,
one oneity can still still.

Prayer in Brief

I bow
with heart in hand
to offer up my life
for larger Life, for brighter Light,
for Joy.

Karma Yoga

Living every hour
in the exact middle
of my weaknesses,
I work some more.

Knowing the ways
I fell apart before
and took poor paths,
I work some more.

To piece together
my fragmentary
feelings for peace,
I work some more.

Pretty sure I will
later fail to restrain
some urges within me,
I work some more.

When all of my jobs
on earth are done and
I'm in and out of heaven,
I will work some more.

Bird Omens

When you go for a walk
in your nearby forest,
you see pairs of cardinals
and thrill to their singing.

One time you overheard
two owls conversing
between bare trees.

In summer you have
stared breathless
at a heron standing
Samadhi-like
beside your lake.

Birds of beauty
want to be near you.
Your heart flies up
with these fliers
and knows into
their knowing.

Today as I walked
across an open field,
hundreds of crows
flew overhead,
snidely cawing from
confusing clouds
of cacophony.

After they were gone,
I walked on in silence
and knew nothing.

Path

One mountain to climb
One abyss to pass over
One crow cawing law

Farmer Karma

I was a boy farmer
because I had to be
because my father
was a man farmer
and all my granddads
back to almost Adam
had been boy farmers
and man farmers
and that was that.
I hardly even realized
that I hated farming
but just did it because
and forever because.

I learned how to
sharpen a hoe
and cut through my
hot-day reluctance
in order to kill Canadian
thistles in mechanical
planticide. Dad told
me that the county
thistle warden might
assess us a fine if we
had too many thistles.
Chop, chop, chop,
I spiraled into each patch
and then on to the next,
never finishing them all.

I learned how to start
the John Deere Model A
tractor by yanking
the top of its flywheel
mightily to the left
with the petcocks open
to reduce compression
until things got to popping
then closing the petcocks
for more power.
That Model A and I were
partners who bounced
across years of bumpy soil
pulling a drag or a disk
or a 3-bottom plow.
High in the bucket seat,
teeth into the gritty air,
I was as much a slave
to the A as it to me,
as much a slave

to the farm
as any farmer is.

I shoveled grain
inside bins where
dust polluted the air
and filled my lungs
so full that
a time or two
I almost died
from asthma.
But dying would be
a slacker's excuse,
and the grain had
to be leveled.

In the haymow
there was also,
guess what,
dust and heat
enough to turn
my lungs into
solid protoplasm--
what bronchial tubes?
When older, I got to stay
outside and throw
the bales onto
the Mayrath hay
elevator and breathe
the same good air that
our cows all breathed.

I was always dutiful.
I never gave Dad
a single hint that
I didn't like farming.
No hint, that is,
other than my stoic
attitude, my yes-boss
obedience, my lack
of any initiative,
and my slipshod work.
These failings didn't matter
because there was the farm
and there were we
and the earth was turning
and the weather was erratic
and new work grew up
as fast as the precious corn.

Dad never tried to teach
me anything technical
about how to farm.
He could see my soul.
One look at me
on any day of any week
told him that this boy
would never be a farmer.
No point in telling the boy
how best to rotate crops
or how to repair a combine
or how to choose fertilizer
or when to sell the grain.
Such breath would
have been as wasted
as a cold March wind
across the railroad field.

Dad was a good farmer
and a good man.
Farming is good, too.
We get to eat from it.
But farming gets glorified
pretty often, and I never
partook of that schmaltz.

I was a tractor driver
who would watch train
after train go by
on the Burlington
and wave at the engineers
and caboosemen,
all of us dutifully chained
to our turning wheels.

I was a manure pitcher
and a manure spreader
who knew the cows had
to produce this but didn't
see my future in it.

Farmer karma was
my inherited destiny
until college days
when I learned how
to be amply engrossed
in motions of the mind
and never later hankered
for any life on any farm.

Itinerant

On my electric wire
a bold red cardinal
brimming with eons
of joyful songs
loudly greets the day
from his overflow

while I on my lawn
try to reconstruct
from tuneful parts
an ancient whole
before he flies
to another yard.

Pain and Promise

If only it
How can I
When will this
Can I ever
Is there any
Why am I
This is too

Better is later
This shall pass
Now to learn
We are loved
Never all alone
Be in being
Endure in light

Upbeat

I wish you
pleasant days and
correctable anomalies
as we all tread
left-right-left
through this
amazingly beautiful
world of pitfalls
and exaltations.

Thank You

Thank most you
for all little things big.

Beams of kindness
illumine all paths of you

and I am days on end
in your gentle debt.

Accept please this
as my up payment.

Night Light

Melancholy needs a walk,
so out I carry it at 11 p.m.
to study two universes,
out and in.

Our neighborhood is dotted with
random porch and yard lamps
lighting the way for nobody
and me.

An hour above setting in the west,
our less-than-first-quarter moon
smiles inscrutably like a queen
in state.

Gliding through the trees, she
offers only used rays to my heart,
but light being now difficult to find,
I accept.

With far-away stars shining only because
they must, above a neighborhood where
yard lamps are glowing, thanks to
owners,

a breath now washes through my chest
inviting me to turn my melancholy
over to night's infinite matrix of Beings
who shine.

I do, and return home with lungs full
of light from outer and inner space,
and from yard lamps left on for all
who walk.

Man Walking

There is a man
walking behind me
on Wood Street
in Chicago.

He can't know
my heart hums
a surging theme
from Movement 1
of Mahler's Tenth.

He can't know
why I am walking
on Wood Street
in Chicago.

And why am I?
It takes too long
to think about.

Who is this man
behind me,
walking?

What flavors
his feelings?
What obstacles
has he overcome?
What song
is in him?

I somehow am
this man walking
on Wood Street
in Chicago.

I am
his walkingness
behind me,
his grapplingness
with his day.

I can only know
my own form
but he and I
are breathing of
the same Breath.

Mahler's Tenth
plays on within me
as I enter a building.

The man continues
along the street
paying absolutely
no attention to me,

this man walking
on Wood Street
in Chicago
who I am.

Some Kind of Haiku

Some kind of haiku
that ignores authorities
lies here in the grass.

Our First Warm Day

If I were to write about our first warm day of spring,

I would write about the stuttering
burglar-alarm honks of a car
two blocks away.

I would write about our waving neighbor
who slowly rides his motorcycle
out into the breeze, seeming to think
nothing of his vulnerability.

I would write about the silent force
that brings the daffodils to bloom
and emboldens secret romances.

I would write about children loudly vying
for token goals and supremacies
in outdoor made-up games.

I would write about the lush air
playing inside my chest in C-major.

I would write about Celestial Light
beaming upon all and within all
while taken for granted by most.

I would watch the setting sun,

listen to the dusk birds,

watch for the first star,

pray my drop into the Beneficent Stream
that flows within every person's heart
and every star's,

then drop into the heights
to write without a pen
upon the folds of Infinity's Cloak
about our first warm day of spring.

World

Is a world hard
like a cue ball?
Or beyond touch?

Does it jangle
with war threats
or does it hum
soft in the heart
like tuned strings
on a fine harp?

Is a world separate I's
on a spinning rock
engaged and enraged
with each other
while blinded by what
they can merely see?

Or is a world precisely
who one can be
(within utmost Who)
subtler than mind
with endless stairs
from love up to Be?

Urges

wild wind
blow me
safe into
all here

all here
let me
fly out on
wild wind

An Inward East

To calm a care or soothe an anger storm
you pause to breathe your vital inside sun
and, richly quiet with its steady glow
of coremost tenderness and flooding peace,
you reinterpret body's aching bones
as levers placed for mystic ministry,
propelled and infinitely smiled upon
by forces which, when tapped, give tenfold strength.
You find your earth eyes lidded from the room
and focused now on lightened higherness.

In light we are as one, beloved friend.
How can a doubt or fear feel more than mere
when in and up we set our inner sight
to see a splendor further east than east?

July Brushstrokes

gradual sliding low of Sol...

flashings out when trees allow...

sidewalk bathed in fading light...

yellow-green this muted hour...

whitening sky holds twilit breath...

shadows paint each passing trunk...

cicadas sing "six weeks till frost"...

hints of night inspire bird choirs...

all scent all sound all inner yes...

Absence

I always thought that you,
dear friend, had been away
due to a long, far journey.

I thought I knew you well,
although I had no memory
of ever seeing you.

Stirring stories I heard
about your distant deeds,
and I felt a link with you
though never saw your face.

I asked you in my heart,
“How long, how far from here
has questing taken you?
Does destiny intend for me
someday to hear your voice?”

My white-haired years
now tell me it is I
who traveled out upon
that long, far journey.

Soon I will be coming back
to share my life’s adventures
with you in a place not
far away nor danger-filled,
a place as near as breath and pulse.

I’ve missed your easy laugh
and kindly voice, dear friend,
but soon enough we’ll meet again
to pray the prayers of ancient days.

Ones

I spot a one.
He changes lanes abruptly
right in front of me, no signal.
My teeth clench.
He is number one in his machismo,
and I a separate one in irritation.

Another one is following my car
close enough to fill my mirror.
I want to slow down
and teach him a lesson,
but instead I simmer along
as one trapped.

I notice my cozy tailgater is flying
an American flag above his window,
loyal in some kind of patriotism,
separate in some kind of jingoism,
and I explore my intolerance.

By “ones” I mean sequestered minds,
“me” people in a universe of “not me.”
Ones will celebrate their personal glory
then perish into their self-created void.
Ones will say we go around just once,
done, with no later come-arounds,
so that when the gustoed body quits,
the mind joins Big Zero forever.

Why don't I think the same as that?
With not one proof that holds a drop,
I see a future human state
unhindered by me-centric rivalries.

Birthing time and time again,
evolving life by life eternally,
it seems to me we'll someday
give up being ones, and enter
fully the community of Unity
where competition isn't.

Though now I seem a one
to any other one
as the other one, for now,
may seem a one to me,
I hear an inner-speaking
Spirit say that all of us
are one with Utmost One
and separated mainly by
our walled-off minds and
pretty bags of bones.

Remembrance

Remembering tells me
I was never not, nor
were you nor anyone.

Arteries in the Cosmos
are pulsing with light
and life and love

in a flow never ceasing
yet constantly changing
in form and expression.

Peace it is to remember
these arteries that feed
from out of the Unseen,

their pulsings uncountable,
their inner motions subtler
than any evening breeze.

Remembering upward
and inward, how not feel
vitality from the One?

I remember (don't you?)
the beauty within trust,
the safety of community,

the triumph of cooperation,
the brave sureness of joy,
love as easy to find as air.

Remembering as I do
and perhaps as you do,
how could one not return?

Bug in My Kitchen

Let me guess,
box-elder bug
on my kitchen floor,
that you know neither
how you came
to be lost in here
nor how you will
get out--but you will.

Fright-propelled boat,
six-oared, you worry
the woodwork then
hasten across
the open gloss
and disappear
beneath my stove.

I shall not hunt you
nor shall we ever
meet again.

I am just as adrift
on this waxed world
as you were on my floor,
and yet I feel certain
I will someday find
a serendipitous stove
to mask my out-passing.

Unclosed Loops

Life after rollicking life
I have littered
and frittered
but mostly learned
within unclosed loops.

The room where I work
is a monument to
get-out-and-leave-out
and all my other rooms
imitate such open loops.

Shall I dare to suggest
that every spiral
is an unclosed loop?
And point out that spirals
are the basis of life
on all of its planes?

Closed-loop people
I have seen, dazzling
in their neatness,
smilingly prompt,
dickensly proud
of their punctilious
buttoned-downishness.

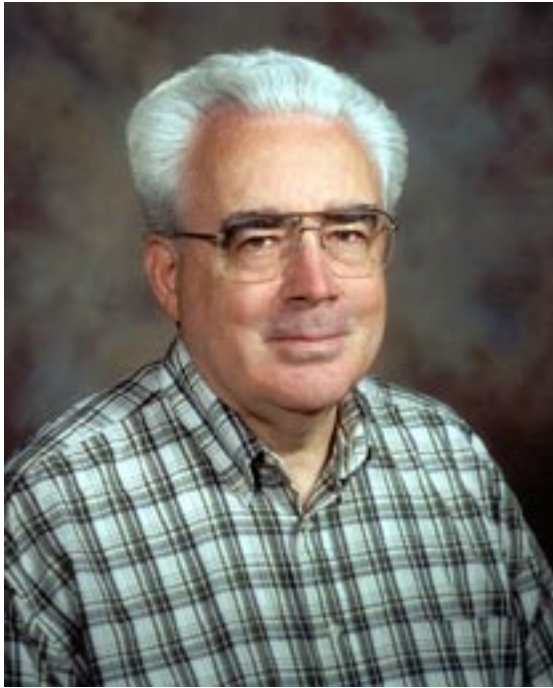
Do devotees of closed loops
expire with a snap, I wonder?
And will I expire someday
with an ambiguous sigh?

Let's broadly hint that
perhaps people never do expire
but instead subscribe over time
to suitably-spiraled-up bodies,
incremental costumes for playing
parts in this human drama
of infinite run. "Death" is all
the rage these eons, but only
for those who think their eyes
see all there is to see.

Let's even risk wondering
whether supposedly closed loops
might be minor quanta within major
evolving spirals.

Unclosed as my loops are,
I admit to irritating the tidy.
Closed, the tidy may enjoy
their control, but beyond
their cubishness a universe
swirls with intranesting
spirals that may little praise
the painful righteousness
of an organized desk drawer.

Now, where is that CD
I bought yesterday?
Has it spiraled off?



About Alan Harris

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

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

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

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

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

In 1998 Alan's literary collection took on its current Web address of www.alharris.com and in 2000 was given the title *An Everywhere Oasis*. After buying a digital camera and taking it to the forest, Alan published several photographic essays and poems which are now available in the site's *Gallery*. Also offered are 76 audio poetry readings, with 20 poems being read by actor and friend Paul Meier and the others being read by Alan. New "Web-only" poetry books posted since 1995 are *Writing All Over the World's Wall*, *Heartclips*, *Knocking on the Sky*, *Flies on the Ceiling*, *Just Below Now*, *Carpet Flights*, and a new 2002 work-in-progress entitled *Fireflies Don't Bite*. Launched in December 1999 with co-editor Mary Lambert, a new anthology entitled *Heartplace* began accepting and publishing work from contributing authors. In 1998 Alan's son Brian composed and performed *Bunga Rucka* (a recording of which is offered on the Web site), which is based upon Alan's poem of the same title.

Alan has earned his living in a variety of occupations—high school English teacher, junior high band director, piano tuner—all of these before settling into a long career of computer-related work. He retired in 1998 after 22 years' service at Commonwealth Edison in Chicago, initially as a computer programmer, then a systems analyst, and later a computer training coordinator. For his final three years at ComEd he developed Web sites for its corporate Intranet and the Internet. Linda retired in 1999 after working for 20 years at an insurance company, but rejoined the work force in 2000 as a transcriptionist in a large medical clinic. Since retiring, Alan has been doing freelance Web design for individuals, non-profit organizations, and other non-commercial interests, as well as continuing his creative writing. Alan and Linda relocated to Tucson, Arizona in March, 2003 to live near the younger two generations of their family.

