

# *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](http://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.

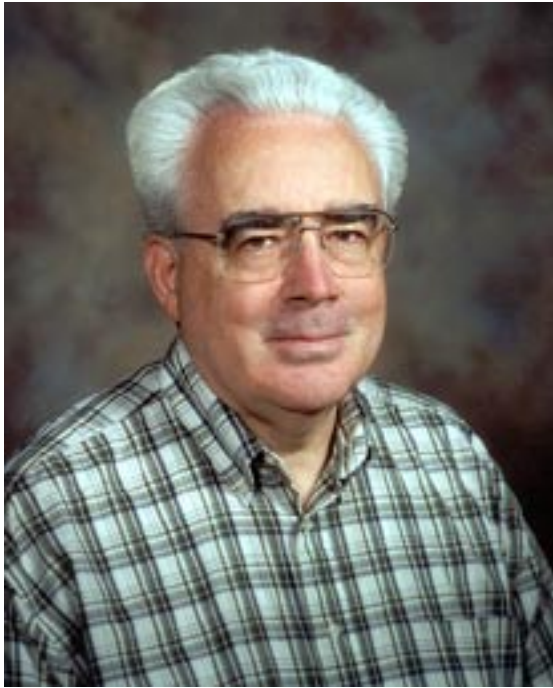
Do devotees of closed loops  
expire with a snap, I wonder?  
And will I expire someday  
with an ambiguous sigh?

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](http://www.alharris.com) and in 2000 was given the title *An Everywhere Oasis*. After buying a digital camera and taking it to the forest, Alan published several photographic essays and poems which are now available in the site's *Gallery*. Also offered are 76 audio poetry readings, with 20 poems being read by actor and friend Paul Meier and the others being read by Alan. New "Web-only" poetry books posted since 1995 are *Writing All Over the World's Wall*, *Heartclips*, *Knocking on the Sky*, *Flies on the Ceiling*, *Just Below Now*, *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.

