

Sparks from the Flame



Poems of 1985

by Alan Harris

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**May these sparks be tiny glimpses
of a larger, purer Flame.**

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Flower in Vase

This budding daffodil contains
A universe in birth:
Each molecule a galaxy,
Each quark a tiny earth.

And what we call our universe,
All matter, time, and space,
May be a single atom of
A macrocosmic vase.

Thus up and down the scale of size
Throughout Infinity,
Both “small” and “large” are limitless
And join Eternity.

Great men have puzzled over God
To place Him in their plan,
As Primal Cause, or Sourceless Source,
Or vast Omniscient Man.

But God can never be confined
Within a man-made phrase;
He hides behind unnumbered veils
Impossible to raise.

And yet we see His evidence
In every time and place—
Behind each seed and universe,
Within each flower and vase.

Inside our inmost soul of souls,
If we can meditate,
We find a spark of light divine
And feel it radiate.

While nowhere, and yet everywhere,
Our God resides within;
Though still and small, His guiding voice
Transcends life’s noisy din.

To hear His voice and understand,
Then fearlessly obey,
Is that which mystics, martyrs, saints,
And wise men call “The Way.”

Consider every universe
And every point in space
As God in God in God in God,
As vase in flower in vase.

Enlightenment

A vibrating soul
Sends up a tentative tentacle
And feels the Divine Touch.

The trinity of clay,
Body and heart and mind,
Joins the Trinity of Spirit,
Will and Wisdom and Soul,
As the one knowing the One.

Seed Thoughts

Part 1: Genesis

Seven soft planets
bloom on the trellis of space
like sunlit roses.

Budding daffodil,
yellow universe in birth,
flows deeply toward light.

Forest dawn reveals
acres of acorns dormant
beneath parent oaks.

Virgin mountain bears
seven bouquets of roses
under Father Sky.

Fohat plants a tree
of apples laden with seeds
to orchard an earth.

Breeze of Creation
swirls sparks from sleeping embers;
monads dance alive.

Seven pearls glisten,
lucid on a stringless string,
linking space with space.

Part 2: Activity

Brooding dove in nest
warms empty eggs to fullness,
cooing compassion.

Honeybees from hives,
inhaling sublime nectar,
breathe sweet hexagons.

Colony of ants,
thoughts darting, busy, working—
mind in miniature.

Moon-struck timber wolves
howl their mantras mournfully
from far-off mountains.

Caged lion pacing,
fretful of the iron bars,
under silent sun.

Midnight crickets sing
in synchronous symphony
to unknown baton.

Spider in moonlight,
spinning fragile microcosm,
reflects Reflection.

Part 3: Consummation

Orb of eye twinkling
with golden glint of grandness—
spark becoming star.

Pool-reflected Self,
diffused by breeze-churned ripples,
returns to deep calm.

Mountaintop vision
reveals a whispering valley
where all is in place.

Mind relaxing walls,
manyness softly merging
until one dream dreams.

Ark of human souls,
riding silent in dark waves,
bound for Pralaya.

Black night sky, speckled
with blazing bonfires of gods,
murmurs cosmic OM.

Voice of the Silence,
throbbing through hushed city night,
chanting “Peace, peace, peace....”

Another Sonnet to Another Spring

Young Aries climbs the virgin vernal sky
And tickles winter's seeds until they burst
In bright-green chlorophyllous flame, well-nursed
By throbs of heat and chill, of wet and dry.
Earth breathes her gentle procreative sigh
Into a billion billion eggs, her first
Prolific breath of love since blizzards cursed
In Capricorn and cold clouds choked the sky.

When hungry lungs inhale spring's balmy breath
And birds sing out "Rebirth!" from every tree,
Our souls trade withered shrouds of icy death
For flowing robes of immortality.
We read in every birth a crisp new page
Of Nature's Scripture, passed from age to age.

Juggler

The blue-black plate of sky
Teeters on a point of zenith
Like a juggler's disc
Twirling on a stick.
Intrepid owls (2)
Interrogate the
Intruding moon
Until splashjangling
Dawn splits
Night blue into
A billion oranges
Molded into a smolder.
Up comes the sane sun
Wheeling the lunatic
Moon on ahead and
Tumbles it off the brink
Of spinning sky,
To be caught by the
Juggler and thrown up
There perhaps again.

Penetration

Pierce with pointed mind through veils of falsity
Toward evanescent Truth.

Smile through hard frowns
Toward patient Joy.

Pray through frozen images
Toward warm Oneness.

Love through burning hatreds
Toward brilliant cool Light.

When Light floods the heart,
No veil can block,
No frown can discourage,
No image can conceal,
No hatred can destroy.

The proper moment is now.
The proper place is here.
The proper act is giving.
The proper feeling is love.

America the Beautiful Revisited

America, while breathing gaseous skies,
Converts her amber waves of grain to gold.
She logs her mountains' purple majesty
And risks her fruited plains in futures sold.

How could the selfless pilgrims have foreseen
The fiscal dust their sturdy feet would raise?
When did their quest for freedom of belief
Become obsessed with how much interest pays?

The early heroes' hearts were filled with fire,
Replaced of late by nuclear doomsday fear.
When greed fails in these days to get its way,
Then hired generals flatten all that's dear.

Those patriot dreamers failed to forecast years
Of lotteries and bets on football games,
Nor could they know what poverty and fears
Would lurk in cities bearing brave men's names.

America! My poor America!
Thy crown of brotherhood is hard to see.
Thy god is Gold; thy goodness yields to law,
And lawyers fight from fee to shining fee.

Random Thoughts

A human is a handshake between spirit and matter.

If faith can move mountains, just imagine what knowledge can do.

A magnet can convert a piece of steel into another magnet,
but what made the magnet a magnet?

If we could just trust the universe to know what it is doing,
we would have more joy and less fear.

Money is the essence of matter; it never leaves the earth.

The universe is a great magnet teaching us little pins to act like it.

A loving thought is as deep as the night sky.

The “Great Books of the Western World” are like newspapers next to the Book of Life.

When wealth speaks, greed listens.

Computers can be mirrors in which we admire our minds and forget our souls.

We crawl through life like caterpillars, fearing the final cocoon that alone leads
to freedom and glory.

Making a Tree

“Make us a tree,” said the master.

“We have no wood, no leaves,” despaired the pupil.

“Plant a seed,” said the master.

“We have no tree to make a seed,” despaired the pupil.

“Search for a tree,” said the master.

“We live in a desert,” despaired the pupil.

“Go to a forest,” said the master.

“We would have to bid farewell,” despaired the pupil.

“Farewell,” said the master.

“Farewell, Master; I am leaving,” declared the pupil.

“Then stay,” said the master with a gentle smile,
“for if you are leaving, your branches will
soon bear seeds.”

Crack the Sky

I cracked the sky
And all the stars fell
Into a pool
Like egg yolks.

I threw the crescent moon
Like a boomerang
But it returned
To its distance.

I pried the earth loose
From the sun
But gravity broke my lever
And the earth stayed.

So I just fixed
A star omelet
And ate the universe.
At least something worked.

Innerness

How potent is the silent voice within the heart—
like roses screaming quietly
 at the top of their scents.
Our inner self turns a valve here,
 flips a switch there,
rechannels a thought, all undetected,
guiding the mind with commands never heard by ears.

We inhale a vital force sent up from the sun,
full of planetary power, star strength,
 universal unity.
We exhale such love as we can muster from our
 little microverse,
radiating peace into nearest air
 and farthest galaxies.

We breathe our relentless ripples
 onto shimmering oceans of spirit.
Each star hears our silence.
Our mental voice imprints itself
 on a forgetless tablet of inner space,
indelible as a baby's first cry.

When we listen, the cold wind carries
 the moan of mother earth
and the rising moon reflects
 the sighs of setting sun.
Those who hear the universe
 humming its silent symphony
learn to love each lento chord.

Strum my heart, you silent waves of love,
with your tuneful touch,
and help me sing the song of space
in the sanctum of my skull.

Reality

Down, down a humming spiral I float
to an undark land that lies about me among unshadows.
I reach out a hand that I don't have, to grope, to touch,
and I feel nothing but soft everything.

Without ears I hear the soft multi-mumblehum
of a misty shore stretching into windless, waveless, waterless distance
where the surf pounds once every eon in a grand, spray-filled creation
within whose star-foam we humanly manifest.

Here I feel the peaceful pulse of Most Inner Underatom
beaming benevolence up through the tree that is we
and feeding our Adam-atoms a feast
of electric apples that never touch the ground.

I see every-you around me and in me.
Here is where you-I find sustenance beyond all paychecks.
Notice this gentle light from no visible sun.
Look at that tiny root leading upwards to a budding planet.

Rising up the humming spiral again, I hear little taps
of what most people call reality.
It is raining on the roof
and the cat needs to be fed.

Claire de Lune

Uncle Bill's piano rolls mellowly along,
Touching dim moods and whispering old warmth.
In its ethereal arc outside the window
The full moon is smooth and slow.

As Uncle Bill's fingers coax the keys
His cigar in the heavy green ashtray
Emits a flimsy plume of fragrance.
The smoke, like Debussy's essence,
Rises straight up and flutters a bit
Before it disappears.

Aunt Martha's supper dishes
Clatter a counterpoint in the sink.

Columbus Day, 1980

There are no poems now.

Now there is a hypnotic hum,
A purr of the practical.

I could have written about
The soft tomblike canyon
We walked in today.

I could have captured three chipmunks
In a verbal cage somehow.

There could have been quaint failures
At describing gold-plated trees.

Irony might have jailed the camera-clicking
Kid-scolders bepeopling the park.

A childish whoop reverberating
from the bottom of the canyon
Could have lingered at the end of the poem.

February Dreams

February seeds silently recall all,
As if winter's death were a silky dream,
And the influx of the new sun's warmth
Were the spark and flash of remembrance.

March will bring the quickening sprouts,
April the lush early growth,
May the flowering of procreation—
And then February dreams will fade away.

How many memories must there be
When seeds reclaim their hold on warming soil?
How many seeds are there? How many lives?
In the stillness of my heart I hear: "One."

Night Thoughts

Sleepless tonight inside my skin and bones,
I feel that life must be a cruel curse—
Begun with squall, cut off with pain and groans,
A little joke told by the universe.

Why am I here? What accident of fate
Breathed life into this form I occupy?
What kind of God would bother to create
A fragile human life, then let it die?

A voice within my heart says, “Mend your ways,
And light inside your consciousness will gleam.
Your bleakness, like the earth, delays dawn’s rays,
But love and hope will end your desperate dream.

“Depression fills agnosticism’s night,
But soon your soul must rise and follow light.”

Haiku Poems

Western glow fading—
decrecendo of songbirds—
stars surprise the eye.

Gray old man shimmers
far ahead on the blacktop
with his red gas can.

Peach blossoms unfold
new petals without hurry,
knowing the sun waits.

Uplifted tree roots
protect a torn nest of wrens
barren of feathers.

My body is still;
pilots must fly in airplanes
and birds must use wings.

A soggy songbook
floats among twelve frogs singing
greenly in the pond.

Feathers up for sleep,
sparrows on wires chirp farewell
to the dimming day.

A brief breeze pivots
over ballerina toe
then swishes away.

Near tilted tombstones
arthritic black oak branches
finger the cold sky.

Leaden clouds rumble,
falling down loud steps of storm;
pounds of sky come down.

Seen through train windows,
trees, like commuters, rush toward
where they've always been.

Speckled night whirls on,
a slow, hypnotizing wheel
around Polaris.

Up through city trees
a steeple stabs the blue sky
with its metal cross.

Green groan of ocean
releasing flimsy gray clouds
to the moving moon.

Windswept blades of grass
lightly brush the abbey wall;
monks seek light within.

Weak of bone, old men
listen to the wail of trains
far in the distance.

Opening lotus,
pure white in morning sunlight—
suddenly, a fly.

Each star's faint twinkle
is a holy statement sent
for all eyes to hear.

Brutal ocean's roar
tames to glimmering dewdrops
on frail gossamers.

Sudden silence is
pregnant with eons of sounds
waiting to be heard.

Raging tiger eyes
shine out from jungle shadows,
rubies on velvet.

The listening sun
paints a coat of life on earth
by way of reply.

Pulses of green life
gently release tulip blooms
from tight, aching buds.

Love's pure silver flame
gives each innermost spirit
invisible warmth.

Above moving night
from her crescent-shaped ladle
the moon pours silver.

Silent cathedral,
every stone a work of love,
embraces the Christ.

The wren's prism throat
casts up a rainbow of sound
over summer grass.

This cricket-filled night
gives forth undulating sounds—
dark respiration.

Warm southerly breeze,
scented by May-bloomed lilacs,
breathes early heaven.

Heavy bumblebee,
magnetized upward by air,
masters gravity.

Roaring punch-presses
stamp out bright dangling earrings
for delicate ears.

In twilight far off
a mother calls for her child—
two eternal notes.

In my dream I hear
spiders strumming their cobwebs
under humming trees.

Crescendos of light
build an eastern harmony
from solar rhythm.

Aphorisms from “Poor Al’s Almanack”

Love of looks is love with hooks.

The man who lends has many friends, but he who shares has fewer cares.

Help a friend, a friend to keep; help a foe, a heaven to reap.

A sharp tongue cuts itself.

The best-laid plans of mice and men too often work.

Dirty hands, clean soul.

A kindly word soars like a bird.

A gift inquired after is a gift not given.

This year’s harvest is next year’s seed.

Give and live; keep and weep.

An ounce of good will is worth a pound of prevention.

When truth needs a voice, silence lies.

The man who builds his own throne rules over a desert.

Greed is a weed that will harden your garden.

Undeserved praise is like a hair in your milk.

If we could “take it with us,” heaven would be an awful clutter.

Her anxiety about life’s end makes her piety seem like pretend.

Friends bend where fakes break.

Every face is a picture gallery.

Heaven’s mansions are prefabbed on earth.

Love and gravitation keep the universe interesting.

The best comeback is a blank look.

The shallower the brook, the more it babbles.

See with the heart—it never needs glasses.



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.

