

Being Well

Poems of Empathy and Support



Alan Harris

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Written by Alan Harris

P.O. Box 1231
Montgomery, Illinois 60538 USA
E-mail: alharris@alharris.com

**“But all shall be well and all shall be well
and all manner of thing shall be well.”
—Julian of Norwich**

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Noon Out of Nowhere:
Collected Poems of Alan Harris
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Introduction

Things go wrong. We suffer. Misfortune can cripple our bodies, frazzle our emotions, or fog our intellects. Sometimes life looks so bleak to us that we think we may never recover our former health and happiness. At times like these, empathy and support from others can be not only a comfort but a stimulus toward healing.

Some of the poems in this series deal with ill health, some with pain, some with grief due to death or calamity, and some with spiritual groping. All, however, offer empathy and/or support, and they are dedicated to every person who is suffering. If you can use these poems yourself, they are dedicated to you. If someone you know might find them helpful, please consider sharing.

Whenever an adversity prevails, consider the following words written by Julian of Norwich: “But all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well.” Time is on our side, it would seem, in this user-friendly universe. May it be so.

—A.H.



Sharing Copedom

How do you cope with nopes, with fallen hopes,
with must-haves that go poof in the night?
Do you glum out and turn numb?
I do, for a while. Join me.

How can you know what you don't know?
You need answers, but all you hear is
the inside of your head. Do you worry?
I do, for a while. Join me.

Is happiness just beyond the next locked gate,
and no one around with key or hammer?
Do you fantasize with fruitless wishing?
I do, for a while. Join me.

When trouble somehow dissolves from notice
and leaves you breathing free again,
do you smile a breath of thank you into the One?
I do, for a while. Join me.



Griefs That Stay

Some griefs
(and you know
yours by name)

twist so terribly
deep that instead
of crying

you carry them like
inoperable bullets
inside your flesh

and feel their
twinges every few
seconds without

letting on
to even
your dearest—

damnable, beautiful
griefs that fit you
like a bone.



Prayer of Being

Oh Nameless One,
if I, as I, am not
meant to be,
then how could I
sit here writing
a prayer of thanks
for my being and
for the far reach
I am from dust?

My prayer only asks
that, to the sea of
goodness that I feel
all around me, I might
be allowed to add
my anonymous drop.

Today you overwhelm
my most lovingness
by how strangely deep
you go into, through,
and around me.

Waitingly, doingly,
goingly, searchingly,
my heart offers back
to its Source a hum that
sounds as much like a
Bach Prelude as an OM.

Amen



On Leaning

Some think they leaned upon a stronger will
when all that happened was this will had shone
a light beam on some girder, deep and strong,
within their own divinely buttressed soul.

Mistakenly, they felt this other will
support their own, when really, all are leaning
safe upon the same Eternal Strength
which none of us can own, but all may share.

The light beam shows it's safe to turn within.



Death Is Life Bursting into Bloom

When I die, I will not die.
I will be a foot coming out of a too-small shoe,
a bird flying free out of a cramping cage,
an astronaut taking off his space suit,
having safely returned home.

When you die, you will not die either.
You are not your body, as I'm not mine.
You will see a brighter rainbow
and hear heaven's ethereal music
which no stereo can capture.

When I die but not die,
I will leave a little part of me
inside your memory.
It will be your key to my door
that is always open in heaven.

When you die but not die,
I will have the key to your door too.
Better to have keys for open doors
than closed doors without keys,
as in this locked-up life on earth.

When I am gone but not gone,
think of me and I am there.
When you are gone but not gone,
I will send you flowers through the air.
Let us celebrate the magnificent safety of death.



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



Recourse

All roads out are blocked
by this rockslide in your mind?
All roads in await.



As Far Beyond As Here

Perhaps your mind, when still, has reached a brink
Beyond which bottom, top, and sides release
Their hold, immersing all you are and think
In boundlessly profound, peculiar peace.

Set free, aware, and only slightly caught
Within the web you've spun of tickling flesh,
You feel you understand why you were brought
To live within earth's tantalizing mesh.

What sage or mystic ever wrote a line
Containing more than hints of what you feel
And almost know to be the life divine
Which tinglings from the vast unknown reveal?

Experienced have you this thunderbolt?
And savored have you since then every volt?



Healing Meditation #1

Always, alwhy, alwhere
we breathe our breaths
within the great Breath.
Gentle now, the breath,
and open, the mind.

If bothered by a grudge,
forgetting.
If squeezed by a fear,
faith in faith in faith.
If too many self-mirrors,
outgoing to the hurting.
If mental moneyclaws,
giving both little and big.
If outstriking rage,
surges of forgiveness.

In our jungle of errors,
out of dark unknowing
each new leaf sprouts
as a separate pain, regret,
disease, or loss of body—
but each, when assimilated,
becomes a sacred leaf
in our Book of Knowledge.

For strength, going soft.
In softness, seeing light.
In light, discerning duty.
In duty, finding joy.



At Sea

I work very hard and I tire—
when will this work be done?
I long for sweet enlightenment
to provide a blissful rest.

*If contentment is enlightenment,
then a cow is Buddha. Rest, yes,
but within the work is the bliss.
Just smell any swamp in repose.*

I want to walk the path
but how without a teacher?
So many paths are beckoning
that I'm at sea with confusion.

*At sea is a good place to be
beneath millions of stars,
each at one time bewildered
but now guiding your journey.*

I feel that I may be ready
but the teachers appearing seem
prophets eyeing their profits,
unschooled in even honesty.

*Will your teacher knock at your door?
Be found on some random sidewalk?
Have you listened? Inwardly heard?
Serve and create; serve and listen.*



Briefing

Here is who you will be:

I. M. Ego

#1 My Place

Selfville, Body

Remember your address
and don't neglect
to decorate your walls and
keep your place unsoiled.

You need to live here, yes,
because your past exertions
somehow built this place
according to your own design.

Here you'll be safe,
with one catch—
you may not think
you are.

“Ego” has grown to be
an ugly word,
you'll notice, but it
only means your walls.

How could you reach
a later hatching into light
if forced to learn and grow
unsheltered by these walls?

Now go, be, love, talk,
laugh, err, create, teach,
glimpse and lose and
glimpse the light again.

Anything is permissible but
everything is accountable
while living in this dwelling
that restrains while it protects—

until the day you hatch
into the waiting sunlight
with a realized reaping
and a grateful weeping.



Mother's Secret

A Ballad

*Tell me a secret of living, dear Mother,
a new one I've never been told—
some hint about life to remember you by
that will stay with me when I've grown old.*

“An overlooked secret of humans, my child,
is that each is a seed that will flower,
and that each has a future of limitless joy,
whatever the pains of the hour.

“And I tell you that no love has ever been lost
nor is anything out of place—
that your work is to strive, to give and to know
in this journey through time and space.

“Your grandmother told me the same when she died
and I willingly pass it along.
May your living go deeper than what you can see
and your heart hear the Infinite Song.”

*Now rest, dear Mother, and sleep your sleep
in a region where pain is unknown.
As long as I live I will treasure your words
and will pass them along to my own.*



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.



Hope and Love

As the earth spins into day and night,
so the human soul basks in light
and quivers in darkness.
And as the earth sometimes has foul weather,
the soul too has it hurricanes and rains.

Hope and love are, were, will be.
Hope is God's eternal nudge in our ribs.
Something is ahead
and, knowing not its shape,
we push toward it nonetheless.
Hope pulls us.

Love is everywhere, and always has been.
Love existed before we came to join it.
Love made us.
Love makes us make more of us.
Love is God's radiant comfort in our souls.
Love binds us.

With hope to pull and love to bind,
we need not fear.

When all is seemingly lost,
when it is nighttime in the soul,
when there is wind and rain,
there are yet two forces to sustain us.

Hope.
Love.

Wounded Holidays

*Dedicated to The Compassionate Friends
and all who are grieving the loss of a child.*

Young, they left our homes.

In a moment, long or quick,
they were gone.

Dewdrops turned into teardrops,
the shining sea too small
to hold our grief.

“Give us our children back,” we pled
as we noticed their plateless places
at the table.

Regret made a river through our days,
tempering laughter,
pervading sudden silences.

Bodies they had through us, with us—
bodies housing minds and souls—
no longer.

The holiday season’s return
makes throb now the wounds
we felt at their parting,

wounds which may heal
in time, we hope,
into strength—

but not yet, in this season
of snowflakes that sting and cookies
that somehow taste of vinegar.

“If only,” goes our carol.
If only they could return to us—
but no.

If only
we could speak with them—
but no.



If only we could love them
so intensely that they could
feel our presence right now—

but yes, yes to this one,
a thousand yesses—
they can.

How can they not feel our love,
being core in core with us,
heart in heart?

We give love this season to them and
to each other as plundered parents
and wounded healers.

With love flowing, something in our lives—
a magnificent, mysterious Something—
guides us like a star.



A New Fading of Before

Midnight will soon gift us with
a new year and mummify the old
as we hope ourselves the future.

Spots became so tight last year
that nothing less than interrupt
could calm my jangled vexation.

My body was less a trusty horse
than a kicky, gimpy, hungry mule,
and my mind, this quirky mind:

why did it need to fly and dive
and not adhere to steadiness?
and why so sometimes irritable?

Have I better to expect next year
as the clock pulls in the minutes
like a child sucking in spaghetti?

Resolutions I've tried—no luck—
I'm strong first, but later weak.
Luck I've tried, but it runs out.

This year I'm dropping formulas
in favor of heartlight and love—
not slushy, mind you, but real—

to hear a friend inside an enemy,
catch the light in the eyes, listen
into the endless layers of hurt.

On New Year's Eve I welcome
this new fading of before as it
allows a stronger shining of ever.



The Other Door

To take a perfect bolt
and start the nut awry
and twist it with a jolt
is like a lie.

To grab a kiss or touch
without her matching mood
won't gratify as much
as tasteless food.

To batter down a door
whose fault is being locked
won't satisfy us more
than having knocked.

For every door locked tight
a second unlocked door
will open with no fight
and please us more.

The one who knocks and waits,
then seeks an unlocked way,
transcends life's petty hates
and learns to pray.



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.”



Healing Meditation #2

Where I hurt, I grow.
Where I hurt, I learn.
Where I hurt, I atone.
Where I hurt, I am alive.

If I could know why I hurt,
and go back enough in time,
I would uncause it, and yet
I know that now is too late.

But now is back in time for later,
so I need to learn all I can
of the living ethics and physics
to avoid future pain.

I search for the Book of Ethics
and find it in other people's eyes.
I struggle with force and matter
and find it all gentling with love.

Where I learned, let me teach.
Where I suffered, let me heal.
Where I took, let me give.
Where I stumbled, let me warn.



Quiet

When every somewhere
falls away and all
nowheres turn into
the main everywhere—
where is there then
to go but quiet
into here?

When love turns
to sand without
any other in view
and nobody cares
except groanings
of self—
might quiet
no thinking
deep breathing be
salve enough
to allow tomorrow?

When demands on
time money time love
time patience time
agonize the brain
choke all muscles
as deadlines approach
like freight trains
honk-honking beware
of broken futures
at whatever is you—
does a chair
still exist in
a quiet room
for a fortunate
sitting--
does air
still surround
for a breathing—
does the quiet
beneath all crash
of all brain
embrace you
for as long
for as long
for as long?



Gathering

A hush around the dying
lacks nothing for no words—

forgiveness by default,
love river-big,
faltering philosophies,
robbed expectations.

The air inside the air
seems ready to receive.



Grief Is a Thief

Grief is a thief
you have urged
to take you away
but with your own
key locks you,
wet with tears,
inside your musty
woolen closet and
turns out the light.

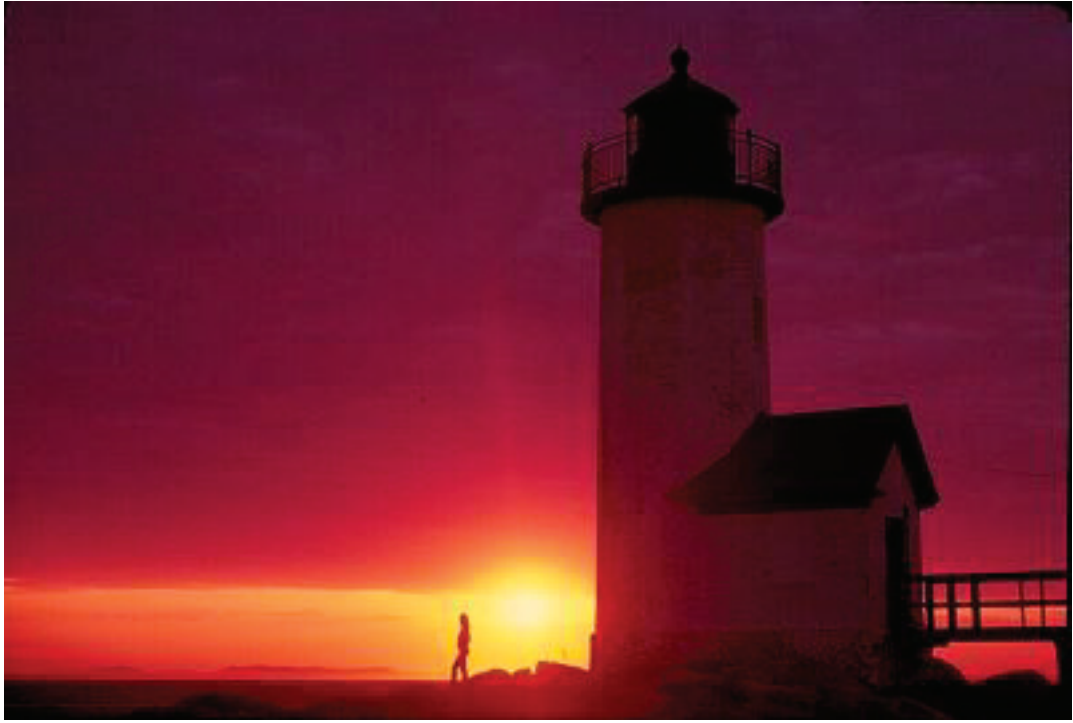
Dark in your trap
shared with moths
you cry long past dry
and choke on all why.

When you know it's
time (and you will):

burst
the closet open
into a room,
burst
the room open
into a sky,
settle for no moons,
pray past all suns,
inhale from Cosmos.

Not earth are you
but the damp wick
of a future shining.

Strike your match
and light the way.



Sun

Our sun
as seen by
the asleep
is a space
heater and
a day lamp
but
oh honey
how very
much we
are in it
and are it
and are and
forever are.

Suppose

Suppose that
many who went before
are still here—as us—
and we now go before
all future lives—of us.

Suppose that
one major all-of-us
is being lovingly built
from billions of me's
as they labor or shirk,
create or destroy,
rejoice or agonize.

Suppose that
from separate confusion
where the me is king
all grow toward a fusion
century by millennium
which births a new being,
its cells and organs we.

Suppose that
space is pregnant with us.





Safe

I have floated like a maple leaf
to the sky below an autumn pond,
to an inner place of rich relief
from gusty winds now slipped beyond.

I sense eternal love from high
(or is it deep?) inside my being,
and find this view before my eye
requires a lighter, wider seeing.

Odd now, the fear those final sighs
would turn out all my lights within,
when light now brings these newer eyes
envisionings of friends and kin.

Since here I live within a force
that moves me anywhere I ask it,
let no one feel the least remorse
upon the closing of my casket.



Together

There was never a never
so always as forever
nor a permanence
so flimsy as finished.

There was never a happy
so permanent as joy
nor a falseness so
fleeting as autonomy.

Insulation clothes well
till it suffocates,
and protection is safe
till it isolates.

To breathe always joy
let our hearts strive together
most brave toward that space
both above and unknown

where our labor with stones
can build the next temple.
Build we together or
become we the stones.



Word

No mouth big enough to say it,
no voice sweet enough to sing it,
but there, riding on every breath,
is the Word from which words rain down.



As Below, So Above

Fragrance from flowers
already bloomed gives courage
to the budding ones.



Confined

Nothing but a precise
second hand is moving within
the solitary stillness of this house.
I convalesce and convalesce while
reading the daily wallpaper.

Knickknacks cling tightly
to their positions, dumbly
flaunting their faded novelty
close to books of past power
that slump on their shelves
like half-fallen dominoes.

Fatigued by the familiar and
glued down by gravity,
I lie back, later sit up,
then move about,
then sit again,
a restless captive of
fever and furnishings.

Every other person
in the world just now is
elsewhere and occupied.
Have I secretly died?
“Snap,” replies the
house, settling.

I lie back down close to my
accurate quartz-driven clock
whose second hand counts out
sixty clockwise clicks and
on and on until
the wallpaper blurs
and nothing occurs.



Healing Meditation #3

Gentle go the waves
that heal me in the night.
Soft are the sounds
that give my body light.

Now my room is dark
and sleep is nowhere near,
but hints of future joy
are warding off all fear.

Soon will come a time
when pain has gone away,
when Yes, a healthy Yes,
will have its mellow way.

With medicine to comfort
and universe to cure
I see no need to worry
as impure turns to pure.



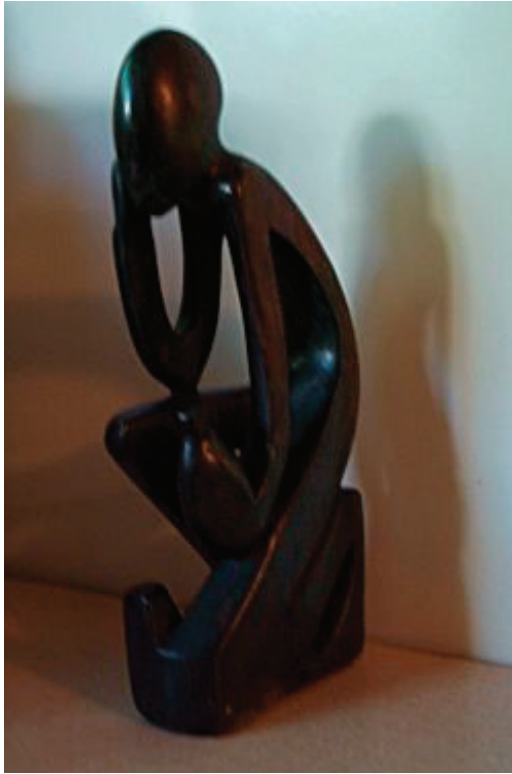
When You're in a Frump

You really don't care,
you surely can't dare,
and your house and your desk
look a dump.

When no one calls up
to go out for a cup
you recline in your chair
like a lump.

Your life has gone flat,
you're verging on fat,
and you'd easily pass
for a grump.

Well, I'm in a frump
and you're in a frump—
let's go have some tea,
you and me.



Bittersweet

You hurt and struggle.
You are ripped apart
like a coupon out of a newspaper.
How can you or I mend you?

When the spirit bleeds,
words are worthless,
sympathy simpleminded,
blessings empty.

I hurt too.
My soul slogs along under
fearsome boredom
and capricious desires.

I am a blip in a flippant universe
wishing for an exciting peace,
a pleasant insecurity,
but I waste away in dull comfort.

Cry your tears into this saucer
as I cry mine there too.
Let us mix them now together
and drink a quaint communion.

We may be maudlin,
stupid and sentimental,
but love tasted in tears
is heady wine against sorrow.



Dilemma

Yes, no—
every day deeper—
this, that—
maybe—
no, not.

Grinding of the gods
peels away raw chaff
from bleeding grain,
daydream by nightmare,
week by moment.

Heartbeats nor breathing
repair this rift that
tumult has torn
between two rights
that are both wrong.

Struggle nor simmer
brings any glimmer
of release.

The breath continues,
but the blood
grows thicker.

Yes, no—
it is not given to know,
but to go forward—
or just go.



Storm

when the storm comes
aprons turn into kites
and meadows roll up their grass
as you hang on tight to unknowing

when the storm comes
all sayings gain great meaning
aha is as real as rocks
but the gale isn't hearing you

when the storm comes
the mast breaks away and floats off
before you can lash yourself to it
and the sirens won't stay on the shore

when the storm comes
the moon jumps under the cow
and laughs at the little dog
then takes back the spoon and the dish

when the storm comes
all yes becomes quite maybe
all no seems not so bad
as you hang on tight to unknowing

when the storm comes
flowers recite scripture
trees are genuflecting
and logic's good for a laugh

when the storm comes
all history rolls up in a ball
all tomorrow was never heard of
and the now impossibly grins

when the storm comes
thunder and winter both weep
clouds seem turned by a crank
the crank turned by an ogre

* * *

when the storm abates
the waves all merge into one
which is as good as calm
but you hang on tight to unknowing

when the storm is all over
the sun is back in its place
everything is everywhere again
but you're still not sure moons don't laugh



After a Mostness of Hurt

How after a mostness of hurt
does flower a sunrise of joy.
How never does awfulness stay
where planets are children of stars.

How warmly a candle lights up
in blackmost recesses of night.
How grieving and torment give way
to palpable peace in the heart.



Roses

If only one rose
ever in history
were seen to bloom,
what awe might be!

Now people yawn
at roses by dozens,
pretty weeds to eyes
that won't see.

If we but knew
we're each a rose
asleep in a bud,
might bloom we?



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 they struck him as rather odd, yet were satisfying to write. Several of these poems 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 36 years, new poems have continued to emerge and find 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 anthology for screened work contributed by other authors.

In 1998 Alan's literary collection took on its current Web address of www.alharris.com and in 2000 became *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 chant 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, having served 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 she 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.

