

Carpet Flights



Poems of 2001

by Alan Harris

Quiet is to noise as silence is to quiet.

This book is downloadable in Adobe Acrobat PDF format at:

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

Not to be sold in any form.

Photographs and Text Copyright © 2001 by Alan Harris. All rights reserved.

Contents

(Alphabetically)

Abundance	12
After a Mostness of Hurt.....	30
An Apology for Art	23
As Below, So Above	2
Beauty	14
Dad's Henry J.....	24
Dollar Dazzle	25
Dove	13
Echoes of Earlville	29
Friendlight.....	26
Getting Old.....	4
Healing Meditation #1	16
Healing Meditation #2	17
Healing Meditation #3	18
A Hidden Sky.....	31
Just Asking	15
Leaf Dance	32
May Opening	20
Meteor Shower over Tucson	33
The Middle Way.....	22
Midnight in Midwinter.....	5
Muse on a Moonbeam.....	1
A New Fading of Before	35
Notes on Work.....	19
Pressure	6
September Fade.....	28
Stars.....	8
Sun	7
Suppose	9
Three Healing Meditations	16-18
Together	3
Ways.....	10-11
When You're in a Frump	27
Whoever Built Chopin	21
Yuletide's Deepest Bell	34
About Alan Harris	36

Muse on a Moonbeam

Twinkle you don't
but glow you do
not yellow not white
through my window.

Half the month I see you
riding above my maple
and I mostly ignore you
because you're steady
and I'm busy with trivia.
I file you under L
for later.

Since muses unused dry up
in the dark of the moon
(or so some poets fear),
tonight I welcome your light
as a loving underflow
beneath my busy overflow.

Tuning into your glow
far beyond the maple
yet as near as here,
I let my writing listen.



As Below, So Above

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

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.

Getting Old

A Burlesque

It's awful to get old, it is.
Today I got pretty winded
rocking away in my chair
so I went upstairs for a nap
but tripped over my beard
which is the same color
as the fog before my eyes.

Then I couldn't remember
whether I'd been upstairs
or downstairs, and worse yet,
it didn't seem to matter.

I no longer care whether
there's life after death,
now that life before death
has become so confusing.

Where did I put that drool rag?
I must switch to a new one,
since we're in a new month.
I've missed church services
for several weeks in a row
because they hold them right
in the middle of my night
at 10 a.m. Whenever I do go,
I'm so groggy I can't tell
the Lord's Prayer from
the Lord's Supper, and I'm
apt to get to thinking so deep
that my wife says I breathe
too loud and she nudges me
to break my train of thought.

So this is what it comes to.
When you're a child you
think you'll never get old,
and when you're old, you
forget you were ever a child.

I catch myself rambling
a lot and hope that people
won't notice because maybe
they are nearly as old as I am
or they might be sympathetic
or at least look the other way.

I guess this drool rag's still okay.

Midnight in Midwinter

Just the finest trace of snow fell
unseen yet tingly on my face,
and the streets were whitening under
a semi-coating of this semi-snow.
I knew the moon was up there but
clouds were having their way.
I walked familiar streets,
my neighborhood oddly hushed,
no traffic, dogs all quiet indoors.

Far off I heard the muffled horn
of a diesel engine pulling its
rumbling train along the single
trunk line past the edge of town.
With each crossing its wail and
rumble became a little louder,
and then each wail became quieter
until silence comforted the streets
like a forgiving mother after
her child's necessary cries.

All of us had our way tonight—
the snow was able to hint of itself,
my footprints showed I'd been there,
the train took some of the silence,
and midnight was allowed its hush.

Now my coat is hanging to dry
and I know where the moon is.

Pressure

In a house where Usually prevails,
where Always-used-to guides,
where What-other-people-think
and Never-been-done-before deter,

a cork may pop one day up
out of a pressurized bottle
to let wine spray the ceiling
just
in case novelty might be okay.

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.

Stars

Skyspread of stars
on this clear night
quivers my heart
because all these
are merely what
can be seen.

Stars may see me
naked in clothing,
caught up in the
heresies of here
and there, now
and whenever.

“Brothers,” I yell
into the infinite,
“Greetings to all
sources of light!”
The aftersilence
calms my heart.

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.

Ways

The way of water
is a downward way.
Humbly it meanders
under and between
until some low sea
breathes it aloft
into our only sky.



The way of forests
is to drink deeply
and unfold sunward
through brittleness
into more calm than
can be understood
by most ambulators.

(continued)



The way of deserts
is to store and restore.
Cacti are old canteens
holding what's dear
behind prickled walls
while basking loftily
in abundance of sun.



The way of ways
is a study in if.
Go we fully know
but ends we don't.
A way is how best
we can walk with
our bag so heavy.

Abundance

Listen to abundance—
not only Niagara's thunder
but two mosquitoes whining—

not only the whoosh of rest
but the whoops of errors
and the whew of success.

Abundance is my golly
and Betsy's heavens,
but also the sibilance
of a petunia's petal
falling into grass.

Abundance roars out its yes
and whispers yet more yes—
the best, it is, of the most,
plus the all within the least.

Dove

Dove rides windy wire,
placid in tumult, slim tail
flipping up and down.



Beauty

Soon after sundown tonight
leftover orange fades upward
into night's deepening blue
above our row of poplars.

How does a sky do this?
It looks so easy.
Such beauty is free to see
yet invites a seeing into.

Who is living behind this beauty?
No name is being spoken to me
but there's an inner rush as if
some Friend from space is near.

Just Asking

I ask how eyes know when to wake
and lovers, when to love,
how engines feel when pulling trains,
why planets need to spin.

Does every point in cosmic space
touch every other point?
Can money buy creative thought?
Is dark the price of light?

Does every pain result in gain?
Does living have a goal?
And what's left out when parts fall short
of summing up the whole?

Three Healing Meditations

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.

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.

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.

Notes on Work

Beginnings are awkward.
Continuings are strenuous.
Easy peace won't last.
Inner balance may.

Death?
Doubtful.
The graveyard's
a door to more.

Requiem aeternam?
Doubtful.
New life,
new work.

Why then work?
Stagnation stinks.
Starvation hurts.
Endings aren't.

May Opening

May is most
too awfully grand
for this birdsung
treebreezed
dewdazzled
man.

All winter I worked
freeze-dried and
to the world dead
in my closed-up
house

until this annual
now, when May
gives me to
inhale vigor's gist
from its generous
air.

Today I've opened
windows and doors
to let livingness in
and release husks of
flies and moths and
thoughts.

My breathing replete
with May's mixed balm
of aromatic everyness,
I've fallen again fully
open.

Whoever Built Chopin

Who so deftly astounds
our roots by means of
Chopin?

How the Preludes
fly and dip and
pause and squeeze
orange harmonies
lasting for days
within the heart's
chamber.

Whoever built Chopin
and voiced his hands
can hardly mean us
any harm.

The Middle Way

When the possible
splits inelegantly
into yes and no
or love and hate
or life and death,
a maybe may be
found in a flower
around the corner,
already half opened
and aromatic.

If a mindbox
has been closed,
sealed with tape,
and addressed for
a wrong journey,
the stewing inside
may blow it open
along a road up
to now unseen—
new steps await.

When any love
demands any hate
and gets its way,
that way is poison,
but when any hate
allows for any love
and acts within it,
possibilities arise.

Measuring won't find
the Middle Way,
nor asking friends
nor reading books,
but work and watch,
step by day,
and strive and give,
mile by year, until
where isn't it?

An Apology for Art

Why more art?
Haven't we enough?

Well, a world of mostly dirt
demands more soap, yes?

A world parched with ugliness
thirsts for sips of beauty, no?

If creativity ever ceases,
that's all the shebang wrote.

Dad's Henry J

Dad and we three boys
rode to the farm and back
in our 1950 Henry J
created by Kaiser-Frazer
during their waning years.

It had three speeds
more or less forward.
Reverse required expertise
lest the gearshift lever
do a free-fall all the way
over to the left.

Dad's black Henry J
had tail fins for sport,
two doors, and a sloping
but hatchless back.
Holes gradually rusted
through the floorboard.
It was a piece of junk
that somehow got loved
and joked about
and used every day.

Its oil pressure light
was never not on unless
the ignition was turned off,
but the engine forgave us
since we gave it oil every
two or three days.

Back seat sitting was
decidedly disergonomic,
but two of us sat there.
We might be snuggling
against a chain saw
or some fertilizer sacks
or old combine parts.

We three boys devised
subterfuges to achieve
riding in the front seat.
We'd hang back so as
to be the last one in.
But Dad was onto us—
if we dallied, he'd tell us
to come on and get in.

We'd spend hot hours
cutting weeds, Dad with
tractor (lucky cuss got
to sit down all day) and
we with reluctant hoes
ritually file-sharpened
each humid morning.
After a too-long day
we'd "knock off"
(Dad's phrase) and
maneuver for our seat
in the Henry J
by ever so politely
letting others go first.

Four cylinders,
sometimes only three,
pulled four weedkillers
back into town
where we lived.
A rain might splat
the windshield's dust
and be smeared around
by the one wiper
that had a blade.

Dad would never stop
at that last stop sign
before our house—
said it wasn't worth
the extra wear and tear
on the Henry J.

Out we would pile,
wary of hidden saw blades,
and the Henry J's doors
would close with a clunk
plus extra little sounds.

Dad bought our Henry J
for \$200 from a local man
aptly nicknamed Bargain Art,
and after about fifteen years
of his nursing the car with oil,
makeshift parts, and patience,
it completely quit.

Then for another ten years
it stood in our farmyard,
tombstone to itself,
until Dad finally sold it
to a collector while
preparing himself
to die.

Dollar Dazzle

The New York Times, Nov. 9, 1998:

It has been almost a year since Egghead Software, a fallen leader in software retailing, announced that it would close the last 80 of its stores to begin anew as an Internet-only operation. Now the company says it is ready to start over — again.

The New York Times, Aug. 16, 2001:

Egghead.com filed a Chapter 11 petition late today, according to a docket sheet in United States Bankruptcy Court in San Francisco. The company also dismissed 200 employees.

* * *

Where have all the Eggheads gone?
Like yesterday's air—to the winds.
I knew their store in Chicago
on Dearborn
near the First National Bank
(which where has also gone?),
knew it as well as my family room.
The clerks there were hard to find
and mostly smart-alecky quick
when asked a question.
Brightly-inked, their software boxes
shouted "Buy me" at browsing retinas.
The unquiet phone by the register
preempted not-so-patient lines of
customers holding plastic gold.
Store policies bristled with
selfishness behind an ostensible
wish to please and a logoic egg.
Where did all their profits go?

I think all the Eggheads have gone
where all the CompUSAs are going,
and all the Dells and the Gateways,
each company captive in a summary
spreadsheet managed by some
moneyman's mind who will someday
wave his magic tongue and say
"No more."

Then employees' families
will crumble and groan,
receiving dread notice
oh so once again.
Grandiose
is Mr. American Moneyman
in his plans, ruthless
in his recklessness, stonehearted
in his layoffs.

Yes, Eggheads have all gone
where yesterday's air is now,
but on and on proceeds
the fiscal mayhem like a rodeo,
each new company out of the gate
a strong bronco that few CEO's
can ride but any can sell off
or shoot dead.

Strip away the dollar signs
and what remains but ego?
Mightn't we just agree
on having a decade or two
of calm cooperation?
After all, we do have us,
right here, this moment.
We're a complex bunch,
but we each
came equipped with
yes, a heart—
oh my but yes,
a heart.

Friendlight

A Good-Bye Poem

When certain folks
become good friends
a candle lights
and remains aglow

and when these folks
round separate bends
this light stays lit
and will always show.

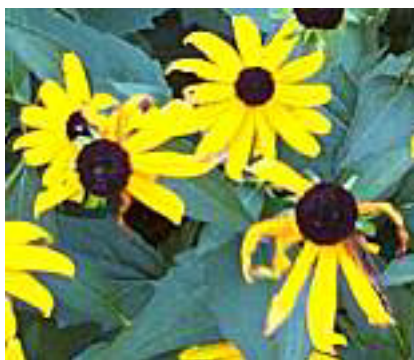
When You're in a Frump

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.



September Fade

Sooner sunsets now—
flowers have gone part-petaled—
white of hair, I mull.

Echoes of Earlville

When someone first revealed to me
that I lived in Earlville, Illinois,
I had no inkling there was ever
any other place to live.
Show me another town where trains
would wail from creek to crossover,
glissando-ing like slide trombones.

I remember winter nights in bed
when long steam-engine whistle toots
would bring about deep slumbering—
reliable as lullabies.
Soon progress dared to usher in
the brassy, strident dissonance
of diesel horns, “long-long-short-long,”
which set the window panes a-buzz.

Percussion also spread through town
from near the Farmer’s Elevator—
during harvest rush, staccato
pops from John Deeres lined up near
the scales sent complex polyrhythms
further east than the Legion Hall.

Earlville was small, so most knew most—
for everybody’s good, it seemed.
Few homes were listed, bought, or sold
without a buzz of estimates
proceeding through the telephones.
Transgression stories relayed at
the noisy downtown coffee shop
made patrons want just one more cup—
and filled the owner’s till enough
to pay the waitress and the cook.

In Earlville, peaceful though it was,
occasional embarrassments
were held quite close to home and hearth.
Shrewd townsfolk having secrets knew
the power that perfect silence has,
so that even at the coffee shop
no mortal ever was the wiser.

I wonder whether Earlville now
is still the way it used to be.
Are the same things happening today
except to different residents?
Do trains still pound those west-end switches,
filling town with jazzy rhythms?
Do policemen cruise the streets at night
and watch for tavern stragglers
who think booze helps their driving skills?

The Leader prints the deaths of friends
I used to work and joke beside,
their laughter now a memory.
Obituaries fail to tell
the grief and joy these townsfolk knew.
If Roman Catholic, they find
eternal rest on holy ground
off Union Street just east of town.
For Protestants and “faith unknown”
the Precinct is the plot of choice,
out by the blacktop south of town.
I’ll join my townsmen there someday
when hidden forces that I trust
decide it’s time I go back home.

Although I can’t be sure I’ll hear
those trains at night from where I rest,
the living folks will surely hear
them on and off between their dreams.
As each nocturnal freight train bawls
through town, then fades out west or east,
light-sleeping heirs to Earlville’s past
will pull their covers up a bit,
turn over, and go back to sleep.

***Author’s Note:** The above poem was originally published in The Wheel of Yes in 1995 as an essay, but it was a poem disguised as an essay, and is here restored to its poetic look. —A.H.*

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.

A Hidden Sky

There is a sky
below the ground.

I saw it today
through puddle windows
along my street.

Big sycamore leaves
were floating in it
like balloons becalmed.

Trees were towering
downly up
beneath my feet.

If streets contain a sky,
do you and I?

Leaf Dance

Breath of a little whirlwind
on a warm November day
plucked up some leaves
from the neighbor's pile
and danced them in circles.

Arrested from our walk,
we both stood amazed
at the twirly bouncing
of lively dead leaves
above a clackety street.

Invisibly obvious, our airy
ballerina pirouetted there
a full three minutes before
releasing her larger leaves
to the ground as in a tease.

But still we saw tiny wisps
of lighter leaves and dust
spinning further away
until nothing remained
but a transparent grace.

Meteor Shower over Tucson

November 18, 2001

For Brian and Patrick

3 a.m. stars were holding
brightly tight to their dome
as desert chill challenged three
watchers alarmed from bed.

The Big Dipper's handle
had fallen straight down,
but upness was everywhere
and never all to be taken in.

Earthbound, we flashlit our
paths around backyard cacti
while overhead, quick meteors
like flaming needles pierced
and sewed at the night.

Several arrived each minute
but seldom did any two
claim the same piece of sky.
Some blazed up so bright
they lit up the desert floor—
doubt but believe.

We embodied three generations,
we watchers who stood or sat
or reclined on a blanket.
Endless depth boggled our eyes
yet we little asked and less knew
why we were alive just then.

Boy, father, grandfather were we.
What all might have happened
or not happened in our three lives
to cause any of us to be absent?

We had beaten unmathematical odds
to meet for this familial, communal
sky harvest, as had the listening lizards
who heard our "Hey!" and "Whoa!"
and "Did you see that one?"

And how better to bond
than under a needled infinity?

Yuletide's Deepest Bell

A scratch-scratch-scratch
of Christmas card writing is
wiggling world kitchen tables.

Tight holiday harmonies
from the stereos fill up
festooned family rooms.

Annual gladness is
picking up speed
as the ringers ring,
the shoppers shop,
the bustlers bustle,
and the hawkers hawk.

Bells remind the weary
of pulsings in their hearts,
transforming drone to tone.

Such yearly yuletide waves
are too magical to be real,
too real to be magical,
too just-right to be
too anything at all.

Yes, talkers overtalk,
laughers overlaugh,
givers overgive,
and eaters overeat, but
a subtle force is working
to knit separated threads
into scarves of good will.

Folks feel an ancient peace
and join at the heart in joy
when the Deepest Bell rings
“One.... One.... One....”



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.



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.

