

Just Below Now



Poems of 2000

by Alan Harris

To find eternity, lift up the minute.

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

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Prayer for 2000

Undecimated by a new thousand (flow flows on),
abruptly we in 2000 seem to be where
we've always been (and busily been),
still wishing for a wish (still praying for a prayer)
to make our earthlife right (or righter).

Were we to dip silently (each) into a minute (untimed),
we could scarcely come up unwashed (unchanged)
by (I falter at "Your" for dualism) some
transcendent gentle rightness (grace)
guiding our souls like boats (adrift in when)
into a nowness found just below now.

I would pray (if I prayed, and I do)
from within most central us (where one is allish)
for easings where we grasp (egolike)
and gentlings where we (too quickly) scold.

Feeling safe and strong in softest You,
inexplicable Lord most high (most deep),
with Light never seen (Force never unfelt),
I pray and pray (and somehow always pray).

Freedom Grounded

Hypnotized by young freedom,
I chased bedazzling baits of my choice
until pain came crashing through my doors.

Thank you very much, freedom.

And I ate choice foods with delight
until my older arteries became clogged
with a near calamity of consequences.

Freedom, do you need to be fatal?

Computer-enabled, I freely flew commodity
futures like a test pilot, with precision eyes
trained on my instruments--then crashed.

Hello, is anyone there?
Freedom, you truly stink.
Can I at least be free not to be free?

“Serve,” says no voice.

Serve? Why serve?

“It works.”

Serve without pay?

“With or without pay--but with energy.”

No more freedom, then?

“Remembering your former agony
while serving where the need is,
you gain a grounded freedom.”

From whom do I hear this?

“From the call without a voice.”

Beside the X

Today I opened
a checking account,
helped by a friendly
banker lady who
pointed to all the X's.

She took my driver's
license and called
a phone number
to make sure
people think
I'm honest.

After the bank finally
permitted me to let it
profit from my money,
I walked outdoors
with only lockbox keys
and deposit slip as
evidence of worth.

How many bank accounts
will I end up having?
Is this one the last?
(I get like this sometimes.)

After I'm finished,
will someone empty
the lockbox for me?
Turn in both keys?

Will a bank clerk
close my account
efficiently while
planning dinner?

Will the friendly
banker lady be
pointing to X's
for someone new?

Will anyone know
what's beside my X
as it goes through
the shredder?

Two Wrinkles in Bliss

The sun is where
it needs to be.

Every breath
in every being
breathes the rhythm
of the Drummer.

All is permeating
every bit of all.

Except for the
peskiness of
atoms and egos,
might not this place
be heaven?

Nominal

Nothing got
my mother's goat
for long--
she'd settle it.

I had become far too old
to be calling her Mommy
but still was
and didn't want to
but couldn't change.

One day while practicing
my trumpet in the basement
(in deference to TV watchers)
I needed her attention
and yelled a questioning
"Hey?" up to the kitchen.

Catching my copout,
she opened the door
at the top of the stairs
and announced,
voice taut,

"My name's not Hey!
If you don't want to call me
Mommy then call me Mom."

And that settled it.
I did after that.
It was easy.

Bond

I
am the
you
that you can't
control.

You
are the
I
that I can't
admit.

Nine Steps to a Poem

Get born.

Have a confusing
non-fatal childhood.

Grapple with religion
and let it think it won.

Work at a job that has
nothing to do with poetry.

Be amazed at how people
can act the way they do.

Revel and fail in love x times
before a settling occurs.

Struggle with y dilemmas
and escape z threats to life.

Fail to let go of an idea
that fails to let go of you.

Hold onto your pen while
the poem writes itself.

thursday

open you up any thursday yes dare
be sure to unzip it completely
and let all perhaps of it fall into

crows on a breeze which land in three trees
where they raucously planlessly fidgetly caw
then skittishly fly toward an east deep in maybe

kids into thursday most bicycle fast
chase whylessly after because without is
until gravel turns skin into gauze

bumble thursday all companies every one
muddy with strategy moving into moremore
hired groans crank oh hum the moneygrind

perhaps on a thursday perhaps on a now
some crow will discover what when is
turn human and lose all that zen is

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?

Three Kisses

The first says
hello.

The second says
how are you.

The third says
it all.

Big Smile

Big Bang
is a fashion
of imposter
proportions,
insultingly
pat.

If true,
where did it
happen and
where were
all the other
wheres where it
didn't happen?

Simple theory,
it is,
suspiciously
reminiscent of
how each body
of us is a
big bang
out of
our mother.
Presto.
Pat.

Four questions:

Is all that exists
and all that insists
atomic?

What universe
did our universe
outbang from?

Was there love
pre-bang?

Was there wine
at a quarter till time?

Observers delight
to tinker with
hunks big and tiny,
but couldn't folks ask if
a grand benevolence
flowing beneath
and between
all hunkness
smiled atoms
into every allness,
big bang or no?

Could that Big Smile
be lightlessly glowing
through all times of time
as ungenesised Watcher,
bemused by
flashchanging
its cosmic clothing
behind screens
of stars?

The Big Bang's surmise
makes a neat stitch in time,
but the Big Smile
feels more like eternity.

Easter Wish

happy so very
Easter
from under when
beyond where
through bluest maybe
above cloudy ago

in loving
quiets of
with

Relief in Relife

(Written in 1984)

Does evening raise a fear of no more dawns?
Does autumn's chill forever kill our lawns?
If not, then why dread gray hair in a mirror?
If dawns and lawns recur, is death to fear?

Is body all I am, a soft robot
conditioned by blind chance, then left to rot?
Is heaven just a slide shone on the sky
to keep believers honest till they die?

To think extinction ends our too-short life--
to think a void replaces child and wife--
to think a shroud blanks out all consciousness--
all far too grim for me, I must confess.

I'm reassured from deep in bone and heart
that when I and my body come to part,
I'll slip it off and leave it like a coat,
retaining what I know, but free to float.

Our breath comes in, goes out, and so do we
who end each earthly life, but then are free
to roam bright inner realms with opened eyes
which see through physicality's bleak lies.

We thrive in heaven's symphony of mind
uncounted blissful years, until we find
we thirst again to join the physical
where atoms quickly teach what's practical.

Like gravity, a pull of destiny
reels in our soul from near infinity
and helps us choose as home some mother's womb--
what most call birth, our trammeled soul deems tomb.

Then choice and aftermath on earth are learned--
like school, where each promotion must be earned.
With open-hearted deeds we all progress;
with selfish acts we duly retrogress.

If death is no more end than western sun--
if Soul appears through bodies, one by one--
then life is no more opposite of death
than breathing is the opposite of breath.

Grandstand Fantasy

A Study in Emptiness

Grandstand at sundown
embraces an emptiness
replete with potential
watchers and watched.

Screams and cheers, none,
nor any spilled soda pop,
nor adolescent boys testing
their fear of strangers--

Greased pigs won't play
before an empty house,
nor will jockeys race fast
horses for just nobody.

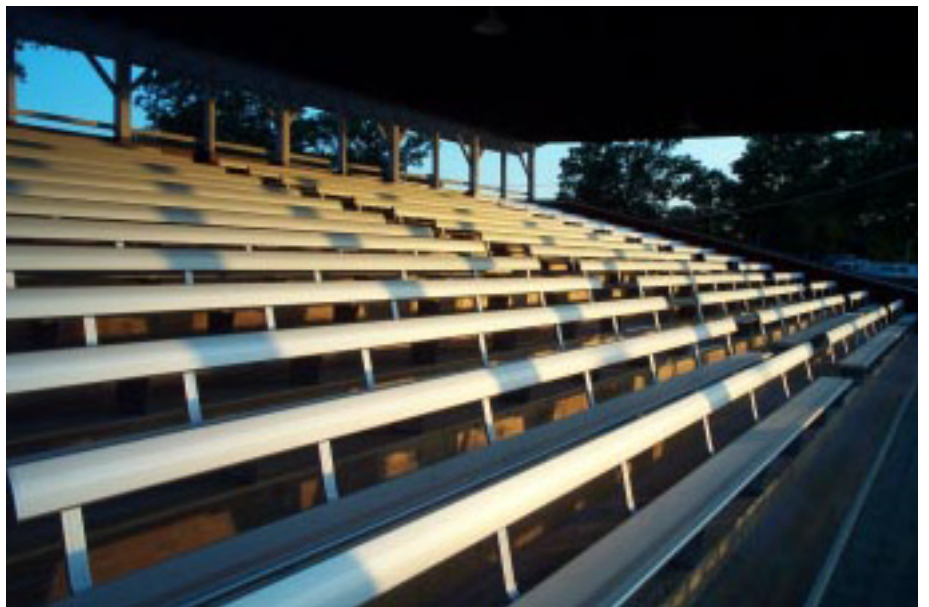
Shiny seats wait, all pretty
in rows, for homo sapiens
to bounce upon their boards
from planned excitement.

Soldier-like in rank and file,
bright red backrests stand
at rigid attention where no
eyes are and no announcer is.

Low sunlight plays to the
stands (since no performers
are), revealing geometry
never proven by Euclid.

Emptiness is given shelter
under one generous roof,
pillars reaching up and out
in a far-flung Calvary.

No one departs and throws
away no trash, asking
"Where does an empty
grandstand go at night?"



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.*

A Love Song

From heart of space
all gift all give
no star too small
to pass it on

Where up a flower
how down a cloud
can any heart
with love unbloom

One breath of spring
one second on
the spatial clock
but oh the breath

When bliss is work
and silence bliss
up down our cord
no song unsings

All alls need more
all mores need all
yet love is nearer
than purest most

Preparing the Colors

Blend faith with impossible
for an enlightened off-white.

A yesbeam can brighten doubt
when droll is mixed lightly in.

Ego turns a palette all black--
speckle this with stars of give.

Gold turns gold into more gold
leaving little breath for seeing.

Painting a ceiling invisible
makes the room rollick with sky.

Where find invisible paint?
Be liberal with stars of give.

The Builders

Temple: none but spirit
Book: an open heart
Mission: help to give
Path: up past the known

Sensing a Future

In this shaky world
where up and down
are definitely known
but gravitation still
poses big perplexities
we'd sometimes like
to shake off atoms
and take a guided
tour of the possible
and if such a ride
were available for
a dollar or a million
we'd buy a ticket
but since no booth
sells these tickets
we continue with
our work yet vaguely
sense this ride is
going to happen
sometime because
we see clearings and
glimpses especially
when mind and air
are perfectly quiet
and love is flowing
up and down and
all through our being
as if red lights were at
some railroad crossing
flashing to announce
an unseen movement
much grander than
anything stoppable



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?

Kind of

Is is all biz
Seem smacks of dream
Why goes with cry
Love always in the of the from the out of the all through the

Recourse

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

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.

Turvy

I rise to sleep
some bliss to take
then fall awake
to earn my keep.



Autumn Glimpses

Autumn's puffy wind
tickles my maple silly--
the leaves die laughing.

* * *

Lifelong summer's leaves
flutter down through fall's abyss
to safe root places.

* * *

Through deep leaves we tread,
seashore sounds in mid-forest
rasping at our feet.

Mahler's 5th Symphony

Overfull fountain,
he rises abundantly
from where springs
are fed, creates from
why hearts must beat
timpanic against
gravitation.

His concerted breezes
blow confusing beauty in
through windows where
merely walls once were.

Triumph, sorrow,
fire, spirit,
love, joy--
all play and pray
in sonic sanctum.

After the applause
we bring our amazement
home and listen to
the wallpaper sing.

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

Every Christmas

Every Christmas never dawned but
as pulses beating in a caring heart.

Every star was never less than holy
leading the wise to kings newborn.

Every mother always gave to earth
a child who never declined her love.

Every child was nearer than breath
before its birth made glad all stars.

Every angel never less than gave a
blessing to all babies new on earth.

Every true gift was never not given
from open hands into grateful need.

Every unseen world is now unsilent
as it rings with timely songs of joy.



Santa's Interior Monologue

Boy, it's dark.
Sure is cold.
Housetop--whoa, boys!
Got the bag.
Suck it in.
Down the chimney.
There's the tree.
Gifts out of bag.
Stockings are here.
Stuff 'em.
Eat the cookies.
Drink the milk.
Wink.
Suck it in.
Up the chimney.
Ready, boys--away!
Sure is cold.
Boy, it's dark.

(Repeat a billion times.)

Restaurant Miff

An old couple,
both over 80,
look at menus.
He mumbles.

She scolds, "Oh,
you're always
disappointed."

Argument now....

An argument
60 years bitter--
stern faces,
trembling hands.

How many lifetimes
will they require
to smile, care, give,
feel smoother?

Love is nearer
to them than the
germ of an instant,
yet they fight on for
fleeting rightness.

Old antipathies
butt their heads,
bam bam bam,
straining old hearts
that do well just
to find their next
beat.

Fireplace

By the fireplace tonight
we are helping the fire warm us.
These flames are as old as pain
and as new as tomorrow's journey.

While the logs listen,
we think of stories to tell
that crackle and sizzle
and laugh into the air.
We confess old secrets
and fresh hopes, surprised
at the fire's way with truth.

What warm gift is here?
If fire were aspiration,
would its color differ?
If fire were catharsis,
would it not still crackle?
If fire were love,
would its flames fail to dance?

By the fireplace tonight
we and the flames are one.

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.*

Benediction for 2000

Long beheld, this cosmic date
brought in a spook named Y2K
and a few predicted woes,
but still we move along,
up, beyond, in,
planting fresh creative seeds,
casting away old husks,
dropping vestigial outlooks
because lacking in heart or
confined to the seeable or
opposing a grander flow.

Busy in a planetary spiral
around day's fiery light,
we persist in our journey
toward an infinite unknown,
trusting that humanity's
third-millennial lungs
will always find new vigor
while blowing away
the dismal dust of death.

We feel deep awe for all
that has ever happened
but marvel even more that
anything at all can happen.
Infused and confused within
the unfolding Cosmic Aim,
we seal our past in glass
and welcome, as all there is
and will be, our future.



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*, and a new 2001 work-in-progress entitled *Carpet Flights*. 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.

