

Knocking on the Sky



Poems of 1997 & 1998

by Alan Harris

Knocking on the sky invites an endless answer

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

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Storm Tea

Please, come on in.
Those kerosene lamps,
the ones by the windows,
are flickering today.

Listen to November's gale out there
moaning through leafless trees
and twisting off sickly limbs.
The winterbeast clears its throat, eh?

How did you make it
through this windstorm
that rattles my picture frames
against the walls?

And why are you here
when no one else came?
But never mind my questions--
welcome, then, to tea.

Welcome, yes, to tea--
to tea from a pot I forgot I had
in a far corner of the cupboard.
Darjeeling today--I hope it's okay.

How did you find my place--
not to mention why--
or, did what's here
find you?

Now here, have some sips
and stay as long as you can,
for the wind outdoors
is surely fiercer than we.

Window lamps flickering
near you and me and tea--
given everything,
what else would there be?

To Wake Up To

The world disappeared entirely
for a few hours.
Gone.
Where were you?
Don't say, in your bed.

You were down in up under beyond worlds.
You took the whole shebang off
like your socks
and went deep into nowhere.

I was there too, but I didn't see you--
or anyone else.
Dead into a most alive life we sank.
Dark into a colorless light.
Reincarnation, is there?
Every day, let's say.

Your bed was pregnant all night with you,
but now, in the morning,
cut the cord,
breathe today's first breath,
cry quietly with first muscle,
and go.

There is go, and we must.
There is day, and we mount it.
It's all a ride but we must pedal,
a pleasure but we must groan.

Welcome back to your thatness
after a blissful this.
You have made it possible
for there to be whatever humanness is,
and so have I,
and every each of us
in our nowhere core.

Asking the Quiet Fire

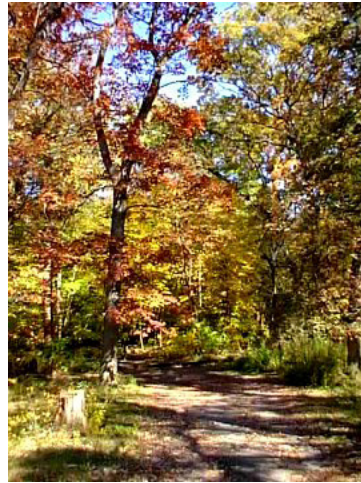
The Forest As Teacher

I ask the autumn forest where
my grandmother has gone.

The quiet fire replies,
“On down this road,
around a further bend.”

I ask why she has gone so far.

Again I hear the forest’s quiet fire,
“She isn’t far, not far at all.”



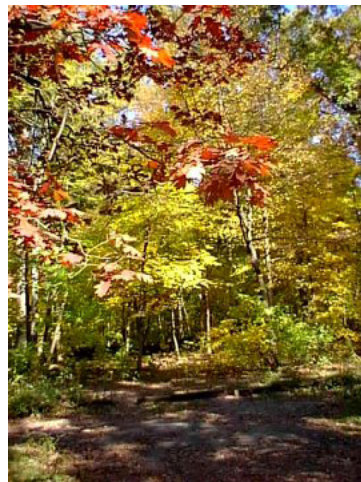
I ask the forest why
its leaves are turning color.

“Only to allow their
falling down to earth
to make a fertile mattress
for the winter snow.”



I ask the forest
whether I myself am
turning color
like these leaves.

The forest answers,
“Yes, your life is cyclical,
like that of leaves,
and all you’ve done
will fall away
to fertilize your
next encounter
with the summer sun.”



I ask why there is
human pain and error.

Soon the forest says,
“There is a larger scheme
within which solitary lives abide.
My scattered twigs may fall,
whole trunks break off,
but underneath these failures
lies an all-embracing safety.
Twigs born high fall low,
and so it is with human beings,
but pain and error feed
the healthy breathings, in and out,
of greater lungs than yours.”



I ask how trees remember
where their sap is kept in winter,

Patiently the forest says,
“Communities of roots
contain an underknowing
as to where all sap
and nourishment belong,
just as your deepest sleep
allows reentry into wakefulness
with no lost memory
and even increased energy.
You move about, and yet
your rootedness remains.”



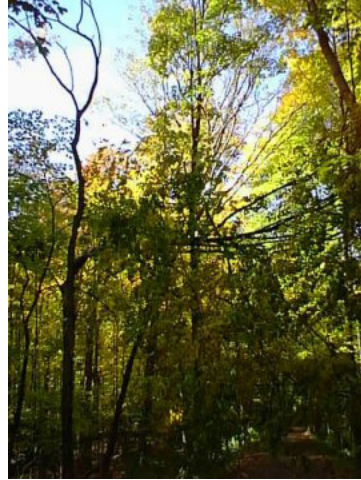
I ask the forest how
disease and selfishness
can be allowed
within the same grand scheme
that makes a splash of colors
beautify the autumn months.

The forest turns my vision
to a tree half-fallen,
yet held up by neighbor trees.
It then inquires of me,
“If all were health,
then where would people learn
the golden art of altruism?”



I ask the forest why
some people suffer
from events they've
had no part in causing.

Pausing at this question,
it replies, "Like forest life,
humanity is fully interwoven.
Say that I'm a healthy branch
but on a sickly tree,
and fall to earth one day
along with this whole tree
whose weakness in the trunk
gives way to heavy winds.
But I'm not just this hapless branch,
now fallen in my prime--
I'm also Forest as a whole.
The spring will see me sprout again
as leaf or branch exactly where
some sapling may have need of me."

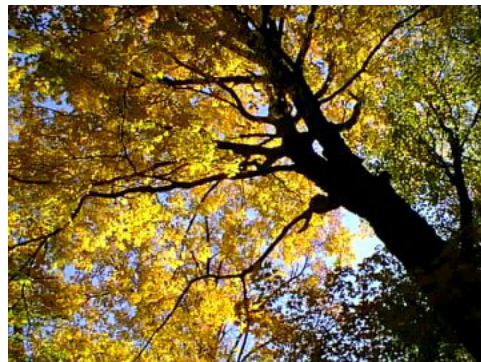


I ask the forest
to suppose all trees
were burned away,
and every human died--
what then?

"You ask me more
than forests know,
but never doubt
with such an earth as this,
where air and water flow,
where soil and lightning meet--
that here the Silent Force
may manifest itself as life,
and grow again.
In fact, my roots feel far
beyond their depth
to areas of sustenance
where life is all there is."



I ask the forest who it was
that made this scheme
of life and death.
I look at trees and sky and soil
while waiting for an answer.
All around and all within
is silence.



Spirits and Spooks

A Rhyme for Halloween

Today is the ghost of the future's past--
your now is a ghost,
my now is a ghost,
for whatever we do will last.

There's hope for tomorrow's yesterday--
you are a hope,
I am a hope,
if we nourish each other today.

Regrets are old spooks that may rattle their chains--
fear is a spook,
hate is a spook,
and so are diseases and pains.

So a spirit sits down in your rocking chair--
What can it do?
Can it say boo?
Just smile so it knows that you care.

Halloween raises our old spooks and bummers--
feelings that dump,
nights that go bump,
and dumbs that evolve into dumbers.

But the morning will bring in the Day of All Saints,
who were able to clear
their existence of fear
and their motives of self-serving taints.

What saints may have done, surely any can do
if we make a start
and open our heart
so that giving and love may flow through.

Today is the ghost of the future's past--
your now is a ghost,
my now is a ghost,
for whatever we do will last.

Falls Visitor

A hundred feet from
Niagara's Horseshoe Falls
hurtling blindly down
with groaning gravitation

stood the antebuilding all
a-color inside, and a-glitz
with trinkets and toys
crafted in worldwide shacks.

Chattering T-shirted tourists,
sporting transparent rainsuits
and chewing chewing gum,
made ready for their big wows.

Cheep! from suddenly ceilingward
descended the speech of a sparrow
trapped in this house of gee whiz--
divinity by surprise.

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.

Still Life

Sunday mind
picks up its pen
behind easy-chair eyes
when, three inches left from a
stained-glass cardinal hanging
red against the window glass
from a suction cup and hook,
is seen a real dove outdoors
fluffed up for warmth
on a telephone wire
amid almost no
snowfall.

Glenn Gould's
Bach Toccatas
play precisely through
the furnace blower's bass
while an off-duty iron
stands unplugged and cool
beside its folded handkerchiefs
on a flimsy-legged ironing board
between here and the brown couch
that bears a draped gold afghan,
throw pillow, and open briefcase.

Eyes divert
to a tiny white nick
in the near edge of the lamp table
and stare for measureless minutes--
then return without reason
to the window.

The dove hasn't moved, nor has the
window's cardinal of glass perceived
this breathless snow, so light
as to be nearly finite.

Haiku Basket

As flies skim the pond
my eyes can't seem to follow
the words in this book.

Early smoke rises
out of old chimneys at dawn,
dark on dark in rows.

A blue silk pillow
makes sitting upon hard earth
something like pleasure.

Drawn by one blossom,
this bee hovers and circles
in fragrant delay.

Six Christmas Haiku

Ice on pine needles--
can it hear the Christmas bells?
Can anything not?

Spider in the drain--
Christmas whoops in the parlor--
silent, dark, the drain.

Scrub Christmas tree, bare--
rooms echo--furniture gone--
mother and child laugh.

Sleigh ride all finished--
the mare, eating Christmas oats,
hears house noise, and snorts.

Flashing Christmas lights
entrance three speechless patients
slouched in parked wheelchairs.

Tree's all taken down--
year's end--where is Christmas now?
Deep within each pulse.

Mountain cabin porch--
tall pines crowding for sunlight--
sweep, sweep, brown needles.

Fisherman casting
for luck to kill a dumb fish--
the river flows on.

Icicle drippings,
slower under western blush,
hint frozen silence.

A woodpecker clings
upside-down under his limb,
tuning the forest.

Cat crossing my yard--
shadow of the Infinite
stalking the Unknown.

Broken branch still clings
to all the tree it has known,
breeze-swayed above ground.

My sturdy white pine
preaches calm to the maples
stripped bare in the yard.

Thunderbolts today
are silent by the thousands--
but this blue won't hold.

Remembered writers
film murderously fast trains
from close to the tracks.

The most delicious
strawberries are the first ones
needing replacement.

First sun of spring floats
due east, orange, fat--for what?
Raindrops and babies.

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

Counting to One

How many skies
has the boomeranging
moon flown over?
One, which breathes.

How many lives
have you and I lived?
One, deepening inside
births and deaths.

How many humans
are in the world?
One, with splendidly
many bodies and souls.

How many religions
are there?
One, tucked into
softest of hearts.

How many universes?
Count to one
until the stars
fall out of it.

How many questions
are there?
One big one.

What is the question?
That's it.

Five Definings

Sky:

awfullywhere above,
is ours to
(of course)
share with
(whoever may be)
God.

Earth:

much underrated,
sturdily
(all the same)
holds up
(whatever may be)
the sky.

Heaven:

sky and earth
in a goodly
(feel the flow)
mix holding
(want them in vain)
all unholdables.

Hell:

doorway to
the back
(way back)
stairs leading to
(wherever may be)
heaven.

Friendship:

life sharing
light hearts
(and heavy)
without benefit
(or hindrance)
of shouldness.

Passing Through

I'm only a guest here?

Everything provided.
Need a bed?
Have a bed.
Need an arm?
Have two.
Heart and brain?
No problem.

But what to do here?

Everything provided.
Businesses,
forests and farms,
books and libraries,
churches, holy words,
other people to
do things with.

But what to be here?

Though only a guest,
do rearrange things,
attract and repel others,
leave your mark on
a world full of
everybody's marks.

*Thank you.
I won't stay long.*

Railing West

Out through my train's
dirty window I see
the clear yellow sun
sliding its way
down into stardom.

A sudden stand
of trees whisking by
allows water to gleam up
from between their trunks,
still as the reflected sky.

Suburban homes
too new for trees
swiftly turn
like fashion models
on a stage.

Dusk is now underway
with this ambivalent sky,
neither gray nor blue,
tempting my train
westward into nightfall.

Sinking like an
orange lollipop,
the sun is being
licked away fast
from underneath
by tomorrow.

I have lived long enough
to have respect for tomorrow.

I have one sun only,
and only one tomorrow.
I wait and wait
for tomorrow until
it's all I am.

Night

Upside-down flowers,
are we not? With stems
rooted upward into the deep?

Your soul, a kindly conduit,
umbilicates your body
into the placental night

that is fathomless and
fully empty of
where and when.

Take away the night? Absurd.
One night minus one night
equals one night.

Afraid of night?
Dread the shadows?
Learn from them.

Shadows tell stories,
emit fragrant meanings,
take you deeper than your feet.

Especially observe inner shadows,
even if they speak no words--
hear them out, and hear them in.

Look beneath shadows--
drop through into wider shadows
and feel safe in full bewilderment.

Afraid of unknowing?
Make your peace with it,
and your days may smile.

When you know definitely,
the vast night will remind you
that you know nothing.

When you wish for powers,
the night may wisely
hold them back.

But to be still with night
may bring you as much truth
as your heart can hold.

Night wants to abide
underneath your day
while you work--

wants to
enwomb you
between days.

Let night have its way,
its gentle way--
soften into its fullness.

Night is the container
of nothing less
than everything.

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.

Here at the Close of Christmas Day

Tonight the season
breathes easier again--
the ribbons are cut,
the paper's been ripped.

We silenced last night
with candles and song,
and today we enjoyed
the meal of the year,

allowing for Uncle Carl's jokes,
Cousin Peter's pomposity,
and righteous kitchen clatter
before the family feast began.

The season's reason?
I don't ask why,
nor does why
ask me--

I just roll with days
of way too much
and nights of less
than nothingness

like a child held safe
in the all-year arms
of Mother Everything,
whose love is all there is.

I used to fear, then fall
from these arms of love,
but where was there to fall
except Here?

If Here can be taken away,
we are doomed--but so far,
Here seems all there's ever been
and perhaps will ever be.

This living room now smells
of candle smoke and new perfumes
as Christmas magic leaks away
into midnight, we still we.

Clouds

A Study in One Act

I've opened the curtain of my east window here above my desk, and I sit now in a holy theater before a sky-blue stage. A little cloud above the neighbor's trees resembles Jimmy Durante's nose for a while, then becomes amorphous as it slips on north. Other clouds follow, big and little and tiny on their march toward whereness. Wisps of them lead or droop because there must always be leading and drooping.

The trees seem to laugh at the clouds while yet reaching for them with swaying branches. Trees must think that they are real, rooted, somebody, and that perhaps the clouds are only tickled water which sometimes blocks their sun. But trees are clouds, too, of green leaves--clouds that only move a little. Trees grow and change and dissipate like their airborne cousins.

And what am I but a cloud of thoughts and feelings and aspirations? Don't I put out tentative mists here and there? Don't I occasionally appear to other people as a ridiculous shape of thoughts without my intending to? Don't I drift toward the north when I feel the breezes of love and the warmth of compassion?

If clouds are beings, and beings are clouds, are we not all well advised to drift, to feel the wind tucking us in here and plucking us out there? Are we such rock-hard bodily lumps as we imagine?

Drift, let me. Sing to the sky, will I. One in many, are we. Let us breathe the breeze and find therein our roots in the spirit.

I close the curtain now, feeling broader, fresher. The act is over. Applause is sweeping through the trees.



8-Word Basket

Original 8-word observations

If you know what love is, you don't.

Let there be three birds in the bush.

For deepest meditation, nothing is necessary--very necessary.

Butterflies around a puddle don't quote any scriptures.

Most of the time you aren't getting killed.

The past is a compromise between innumerable futures.

Don't fight who's right or wrong who's wrong.

Anyone who likes to compliment finds ready listeners.

Bliss without having suffered is a mental confection.

Doubt fueled by compassion resembles faith without pretense.

The last word is never the last word.

Grief cooks a nourishing oatmeal for the soul.

Whatever you can no longer bear, you do.

Suicides can create absences stronger than many presences.

Fear of death is the mother of law.

Indignation that is righteous is usually your own.

Bosses struggle for years to rise into contempt.

Getting fired means you'll never be the CEO.

Gossip is as despised as it is necessary.

Two agree; three harmonize; six acquiesce; twelve stew.

Waking up is going to sleep from sleeping.



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.

