

# *Writing All Over the World's Wall*



*Poems and Aphorisms of 1995*

*by Alan Harris*

**Nothing matters, and so does everything.**

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*Noon Out of Nowhere:*  
*Collected Poems of Alan Harris*  
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# Contents

Needlework (Pokes and Turns of Thought) .....	1-5
Pieces of Eight .....	6
8 x 20 .....	7
13 Signs of Bad Luck .....	8
21 Tasteless Fortune Cookies.....	9
Frequently Asked Questions About Christmas .	10
1995 Poems.....	11
Poetry Poem.....	12
Confined.....	13
Bunga Rucka.....	14
Colorado Joining, 1995.....	15
Forgotten Flowers .....	16
Homeglow after Visitors .....	17
Napping in the Flavors.....	18
Keeping Here .....	19
Looking Forward .....	20
A Wiggy Sopsty .....	21
Tree Choirs.....	22
Sentence .....	23
An Old Man's Fancy .....	24
About Alan Harris .....	25



## Needlework

### Pokes and Turns of Thought

Mankind's three deepest imponderables are infinity, eternity, and stupidity.

A good friendship, like a good river, comes back together after hitting a rock.

Even when things are all in place, they're very close to being out of place.

Most of us know someone whose purity of soul smells a bit like bleach.

Richest blessings move slowly because so much moves.

As for best-laid plans, mice do much better.

What could be sweeter than success, or briefer?

A teardrop is a liqueur to the future.

Quantitative psychology sticks its pins through living butterflies.

Retail marketing is the last frontier of nonsense.

Picture your worst fear. Now don't. Feel better?

Friends have love without vows, faithfulness without reason.

Who deserves to beg? At some time, everybody.

Ride in your car; ride in a mystery.

Insurance companies and doctors agree on one thing: nothing.

The kindness of a kind teacher is the kindest kindness of all.

Scientists have discovered few forms of life that behave more predictably than a manager on the way up.

When the chariot swings low for my soul, slip the horses some extra oats, okay?

Our commencement speaker revealed at length his firm grasp of the obvious.

Every new human being is an impossibility become inevitable.

Diet-conscious cannibals may eat only vegetarians.

Few besides Realtors love a snob.

In an emotional universe, kisses are the gravity.

Rumors are disagreeable to many; but then, so is the truth.

Anything you can get away with, you can't.

Christmas and a minimum universe both require a star and some generosity.

Friendships with others bring us heaven before heaven.

Brilliance needs words; character, pauses.

Fame is a sea that washes up new names like foam onto beaches.

### **Morning Prayer**

Now I wake me up from bed;  
I thank the Lord I'm still not dead.  
The Lord declined my soul to take  
for reasons which remain opaque.

Consensus usually belongs to the first one who dares to *ahem* and summarize.

"Employees Must Wash Hands" posted in the restroom translates to "Dine Elsewhere" even if no cockroaches are currently visible.

Need we be terribly surprised at the shortcomings of a world that is substantially run by the personalities who dominate meetings?

Today remains our only hope for tomorrow's yesterday.

Nothing deepens character like a firmly balanced dilemma.

The corn husk will never understand the corn.

**Hint to Bottom-Line CEO's**

Reducing employees to digits  
may cause a cessation of widgets.

To find order in chaos, stop looking there.

Everybody is said to be unique, but most people are unique in about the same way.

Even as a bud, given water, becomes a flower, the office sycophant, given power, will become an autocrat.

For chest cold recovery, we must learn to always expectorate the unexpected.

Leave the past behind you, but if part of it gets back in front of you, ask it why.

In truest love, giving and taking become moot.

The teeth of adversity grow directly behind the smile of fortune.

A local church begins as a fire in people's hearts, and sometimes ends as a structure whose windows no one wants to wash.

For TV addicts, death may cause minor personality changes.

He deceived her in ways which made her feel so loved.

A newborn's first thought: "Now what?"

Adolph Hitler was reputedly the Dictatorian of his high school graduating class.

It is better to have tried and failed than never to have failed at all.

After a motivational seminar I feel like new frosting on an old cake.

During college his deepest thought never got down as far as his knees.

**Morning Glory Manager**

He smiled his way to power,  
enjoyed his sunny hour,  
then made some big boys frown  
and smiled his way back down.

A politician walked up to the Pearly Gates, shook St. Peter's hand vigorously, and announced, "God has my full support."

If you would hear the song of the infinite, listen quietly through the ends of your toes.

He carefully hid his feeling of superiority behind a smug expression.



All of life is a near-death experience.

Choose bravely; learn deeply.

Tears are from the soul wetting its pants.

Every day is more evidence of forever.

Motherhood is hereditary. If you never had a mother, chances are your children won't have one either.

After all I've been through, hell should be a breeze.

Dogs offer you humility, while cats invite it.

A shelf in need is a floor indeed.

Exits from the freeway of truth begin at a small angle.

Walk where your feet are.

The hell you feel is the one that's real.

Why can't we not worry by not wanting to worry?

Reality is what's left to us after all of our failures to find it.

Hell provides a room  
for people who assume,  
which gets some ventilation,  
but my, what a population!

Kind acts never die,  
and what is kind in yourself  
was waiting for you.

His dark blue suit had yes written all over it.

It's easy to be critical, but it's even easier to be bureaucratic, which is why bureaucracy is always ahead of its critics.

The caskets of beggars and vice presidents close with the same snap.

Hell is an archive of souls too interesting for heaven.

Technology offers a profusion of easier ways to live a life we don't understand.

If God had forbidden the snake too, would Adam and Eve have eaten it for dessert?

In his climb up the corporate ladder he was able to overcome all vestiges of past humility.

Senile? Not me. I can't remember the last time I forgot something.

A lottery consists of a few million poor fools chipping in to create a rich one.

God hells those who hell themselves.

Infinity is the quickest shortcut to the unknown.

People you have to interrupt so they can see your side, won't.

Nice days are more made than had.

I have my life well under control except for:

1. how much I eat,
2. how much I sleep,
3. what I say,
4. what I do.

You know you're getting old when you notice that your first name is being given to babies again.

**Pessimist:** looks both ways before crossing a one-way street.

**Corpse:** didn't.

Is this a user-friendly universe?

Computers won't ever become minds until they can cry--and mean it.

Creativity leads to crisis, which leads to creativity.

American work ethic: busy is good, frantic is excellent, and burnt-out is sublime.





# Pieces of Eight

The three numbered lists which follow all consist of 8-word sentences.

## 8 x 20

1. If life isn't eternal, who cares what is?
2. Everybody's a town of one with no mayor.
3. For long life, inhale each time you exhale.
4. The tongue inside the brain speaks awfully bravely.
5. A grandmother's love could light a large city.
6. Looking within, one sees little, and grows humbler.
7. Each person is a jewel polished by trouble.
8. Consequences teach what parents and teachers failed to.
9. Good people die, and good people let them.
10. Ideas, when nameable, are ready for the textbooks.
11. The server and the served become mutually obligated.
12. Moods enter children like breezes through open windows.
13. One person lies, two people conspire, three incorporate.
14. Fancy dinners taste somewhat of the hostess's ego.
15. Earth life is a carnival for the soul.
16. Without roses, thorns would be out of business.
17. We develop a fondness for people we help.
18. A baby's future lies in its parents' past.
19. Ignoring people's promises doubles pleasure when they're kept.
20. A library contains millions of pages of maybe.

## 21 Tasteless Fortune Cookies

1. You drive hard bargain and eat cheap Chinese.
2. You've overeaten shamefully and will soon suffer.
3. You wouldn't know the truth if you told it.
4. You find love everywhere, and detectives follow you.
5. You're a patient person until someone delays you.
6. In two hours you will experience hunger again.
7. Your spouse pretends to be faithful to you.
8. Your necktie looks better now with soy sauce.
9. This cookie not know damn thing about you.
10. Children love you, provided you give them money.
11. You speak kind words to people you like.
12. Eating this fortune cookie alone? Just call 555-3838.
13. Your smile must seem attractive in your mirror.
14. Someday you'll be famous, or someone else will.
15. Your reputation remembers the faults you have forgotten.
16. Weather in China today: cloudy, cooler, and windy.
17. Americans like you look good in cheap clothes.
18. You are successful, and powerful people ridicule you.
19. Breaking this cookie brings on 21-year Chinese curse.
20. Trust not everyone who laughs at your wit.
21. Chinese wise man writing this seeks better employment.

## **13 Signs of Bad Luck**

### **It is bad luck if:**

1. A pit bull doesn't finish crossing your path.
2. Your psychiatrist falls asleep while you're talking.
3. You discover your broker has renounced monetary gain.
4. You receive a registered letter from your spouse.
5. Your dentist starts to plan a world tour.
6. Our President broadcasts a plea to remain calm.
7. Your doctor starts wanting you to pay ahead.
8. Your PC screeches when you turn it on.
9. Inside the company elevator you begin to float.
10. Your boss begins, "You've been a good employee. . . ."
11. Your flight attendant has strapped on a parachute.
12. The neighbor boy always talks about making fires.
13. Your surgeon has a Band-Aid on his finger.

## Frequently Asked Questions about Christmas

**Q:** If Santa doesn't have to age, then why has he become old?

**A:** He only appears to be old. He's an undercover kid.

**Q:** How can a sleigh possibly fly through the air?

**A:** If you were being pulled by eight flying reindeer, wouldn't you fly too?

**Q:** Why do we wish people a "Merry Christmas" instead of a "Happy Christmas"?

**A:** The two are about the same, but with "Merry Christmas" an extra twinkle is seen in the eyes.

**Q:** Why is a Christmas tree that has been chopped down called a "live Christmas tree"?

**A:** It's dead but doesn't know it, and yet it's having the time of its life.

**Q:** Why do we wrap our Christmas gifts with paper?

**A:** Because we like to see surprise and joy (real or kindly faked) in the recipients.

**Q:** How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?

**A:** Nowadays only four angels can dance there. Formerly there was no limit, but OSHA passed the Angel Safety Law recently, which also requires that the pin must be inspected twice each year for structural defects.

**Q:** How many gifts can Santa Claus's bag hold?

**A:** One less than infinity. Why one less? Because there's a limit to everything.

**Q:** How could a star that is high in the sky lead the Wise Men to a tiny manger on the ground?

**A:** Wisely, toward the end of their journey they asked directions from someone on the road. Had they not been so wise, they might have missed the manger by several hundred miles. (That person on the road has never been identified.)

**Q:** Is there really a Mrs. Santa Claus?

**A:** The best way to know for sure is to ask Santa Claus next time you see him.

**Q:** Why do we hear so many bells at Christmas time?

**A:** Because so many people ring them.

**Q:** Why do so many people ring bells at Christmas time?

**A:** For the poor, for the joy, and because a bell can say what words can't say.

**Q:** What can't words say?

**A:** The moment you wake up on Christmas morning, listen carefully. You may hear then what words can't say.

# 1995 Poems



## Poetry Poem

Awfully many poems these days  
seem chains of syntactical screams  
with metaphors careening on two wheels  
and coy diction that raises its hand  
and says "I said that!"

Some poems are easily read like  
the smile of a friend you are visiting  
who sits you down on a clean couch  
with a peanut butter cookie and  
makes you feel warm inside  
with talk and apple cider.

Darker poems  
can insinuate  
somewhere below  
your belt with  
startling obscurity  
or grab greedily  
at your possibilities.

Kinds and kinds of poems  
spring to being  
like sparks from a grindstone  
that sharpens inner tools.

Poets tell lies that are  
deeper than truth,  
and refuse to quit writing  
all over the world's wall.

How is a poem written?  
Find one inside  
and watch.

## 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.

## Bunga Rucka

We are murmurs we know nothing  
Bunga Rucka Bunga Rucka  
We live down above exactness  
Nothing say we nothing say we

Here between between we listen  
Bunga Rucka Bunga Rucka  
Nothing here no nothing here  
Below the Bunga Rucka line

No speaking here no words not one  
No thinking down in under here  
More underneath than want or wish  
Where where is never when is nowhere

Happy laughter high and deep goes  
Snortle chortle yukka yukka  
Sweet it sounds above our silent  
Seepings in and in and in where

Bunga Rucka know no knowledge  
Bunga Rucka love all loving  
Bunga Rucka shine all darkness  
Bunga Rucka shout all silence

Bunga Rucka Bunga Rucka  
Feel us in you Bunga Rucka  
Feel you in us Bunga Rucka  
Bunga Rucka Bunga Rucka

## Colorado Joining, 1995

*Jim & Annette Campbell*

*Greg & Lois Harris*

*Art & Jeanette Mark*

*Ralph & Jeanne Wiley*

*Alan & Linda Harris*

Five couples,  
each married within a love  
they cannot explain--

Five couples,  
amply tested by fear and the unexpected--

Five couples,  
totaling more than 500 years  
on this sweet, dangerous earth--

Five couples,  
homes scattered across the map  
like peppers across a pizza--

Five couples  
congregated for a week in the same house  
like ten peas in a pod--

Five couples  
who know the grieving and groaning of loss--

Five couples  
who know the ecstasy of tearful laughing--

Five couples  
discovering their unknown way  
as they walk together  
in grace and joy and love.

# Forgotten Flowers

Through an oversight the poems on the following pages escaped compilation in previous books, and were discovered in the back of a lower file drawer. Making a late debut below are “A Wiggy Sopsty,” written in 1988, and seven other poems written in 1991-92.

## Homeglow after Visitors

Two couches  
smile in dim light  
over the active  
weights they  
recently bore.

Spots on the wallpaper  
remember certain  
apt verbs.

Ceiling regions  
glow with laughings  
over sudden quips.

Hopes,  
confessions,  
worries  
have now slipped out  
through the windows  
to germinate or vanish  
in the sod outdoors.

Are the smiles,  
the glows,  
the illuminations  
that haunt our home  
still stirring within  
our sometime  
visitors?

A spring inside  
the older couch  
chuckles.



## Napping in the Flavors

I slid downhill  
into my Sunday nap,  
and there I was again,  
swimming in an aromatic  
alphabet soup where all words  
ran together into a flavor.

If only poets could  
somehow write  
in immediate flavors,  
bypassing all  
those gangly,  
awkward letters  
spelling out unsavored,  
predigested words--  
then what a banquet  
people might enjoy.

But no, the poets  
have to keep on writing  
precious words about  
their bloodstained sunsets,  
their gold leaf autumns,  
their salty pepper,  
and I have no idea  
what other absurdities,  
just to jolt  
the taste buds  
on our jaded tongues  
away from neutral.

So anyway, my nap--  
I'm now awake,  
but have no splendid poems  
to bring back from my bliss.  
The soup there,  
by the way,  
was delicious.

Make your own.

## Keeping Here

I wake to morning's  
window-filtered sounds  
and hear a  
cardinal outside  
my bedroom,  
daring to fill  
the early air with a  
questioning refrain:

"Where's here?  
Where's here?  
Where's here?"

An idea flashes brainward  
out of recent sleep as,  
having risen from my bed,  
I stand within  
a splash of sunlight  
on the carpet--  
an idea taking on words:  
"How you feel  
is from what you do.  
To feel differently,  
do differently.  
Start here."

I stand still in the light.  
"What changes shall I make?" I ask  
whoever's listening,  
outdoors or innerly.

The same cardinal,  
broadcasting  
guru-like atop  
the neighbor's  
television tower,  
gives simple counsel  
three times again:

"Keep here.  
Keep here.  
Keep here."

Odd,  
but on the farm  
when I was young  
I used to shoot  
birds  
with my BB gun.

## Looking Forward

Long after I have laughed my last,  
corn husks will still flap and cackle yearly  
in the frosty wind.  
Hopeful farmers will plant and reap  
and worry through every weather.

Statuesque cows will still moo and moan  
their mantras low like tubas in metal sheds  
incensed with daily hay.

In select suburbs far from farms,  
ladies with airs will continue tinting  
and teasing their failing hair  
or flashing acquired fashionabilities  
into their lighted full-length mirrors--  
ladies who will still ache at night  
for a gleaming knight  
between snorings  
of their well-off wimp.

By then I will have poked  
this life's reapings and hopings  
up through my cranial chimney  
and passed beyond breath.  
With no nose to interfere,  
coffee may smell richer.  
Free of fumbling fingers,  
I may play Bach heaven-like  
on an unmoolecular piano.

Then, by and by and by,  
in my next soulbeat,  
I could emerge again  
from a provided womb,  
suck into baby lungs  
a deep inspiration,  
and cry within my new hell  
for a heaven of love and milk.

I'm wondering now if,  
rather than burden my brain  
with all of this forward thought,  
I need to read a good mystery.

## **A Wiggy Sopsty**

I falt a wiggy sopsty  
and clev a vagger gand;  
no swegler fad a seggy  
nor vindo sendy mand.

When jigmer salgo varyd  
was tiggy varomund,  
then cladry falgarondo  
with pleggy fabripund.



## Tree Choirs

High twigs in the trees--  
do they croon nocturnal chords  
to you out of a winter-spring wind?  
Chords not merely for ears, perhaps,  
but chords filling human with being?

Seasonally smitten with tingly new sap,  
each leeward-leaning trunk  
resigns helpless branches to the air,  
eerie groans waxing and waning  
as from a deep unknown  
just behind where you live.

How do you feel?  
Try setting aside your daily newspaper  
and turning into nothing but ears  
to follow these pining strains.  
How far inside of you go those moans?  
Have they turned you inside out yet?  
No?

Then listen all night, all night, all night.  
Listen all night,  
and waken.

## Sentence

Back of our house  
a lovable stray pooch,  
young and off-white  
with random black  
Mendelian punctuation,  
darts about and sniffs grassy clumps  
until, eyeing a soggy tennis ball  
wedged under the neighbor's fence,  
she plucks it up in her teeth  
and prances puppylike for attention  
as if mankind needs to please play ball  
(has she romped with children  
before being dumped out of  
their father's midnight-slinking car?),  
seeming ignorant or heedless  
that ball is not played  
where she is going to go--  
by way of famishing jaunts  
through shrubby neighborhoods,  
altercations with kept cats  
and with collared mutts,  
a trusting ride  
in the dogcatcher's van,  
and a meager feast or two  
before the period  
at the end  
of her  
sentence.



## An Old Man's Fancy

Stepping through the front door  
into vernal flowerings,  
I sense a breeze of early manhood  
through my body-window.

There was family then,  
so much family  
that we almost didn't  
want that much--  
now just you and I  
and an occasional kiss.

There were trembling bushes  
and thrilling winds.  
Internal landscapes  
tumbled over each other,  
vying for supremacy  
with surging colors.

What landscape now?  
Same one as then,  
only someone drained  
the colors out of it.

Now, living is sensible,  
good, right.  
Then, it was exploding  
with overfelt feelings.

Young men march  
to any drummer they hear,  
while old men smile  
and tap on the table.





## 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](http://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.

