

Short Poems

Volume One

By Gene Burnett

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These poems were written between the Summer of 1999 and December of 2004. Some were written as my part of poetry dialogues with friends. While not conforming to any particular style of short poetry, I did limit myself to what would fit on a lined 4 X 6 index card. The total number of lines could not exceed the number of lines on the card and I wrote in my normal sized writing.

For the past 2 years I have not written any poems at all. Recently, after attending several local Poetry Slams I decided to enter and read some of my own. I found that I really enjoyed sharing them out loud. I've also become interested in writing more poetry. Before embarking on a new phase of writing, I decided to "clean house" and organize what I'd already written. The result of that housecleaning is this book.

I teach T'ai-chi for a living and spend a lot of time outdoors teaching and practicing. To me T'ai-Chi is an interesting mix of wild nature and human nature. When I'm practicing T'ai-chi I feel my animal biological self, meeting my human civilized self. For this reason I prefer to practice T'ai-Chi in parks, where nature meets culture, rather than in a civilized training hall or out in the wilderness. A lot of my inspiration comes from what I observe in this ongoing process of balancing my wild nature and my civilized nature. Love and relationship is another arena where these two natures meet and is another source of inspiration for me.

I hope you enjoy these short poems and feel inspired, not only to write some of your own, but to share them with your friends and community.

Gene Burnett
Ashland, OR
Spring 2006

For Samarra

February
A false Spring
Stirs my Summer mind
All at once
What's coming is coming
What's here is here

I think of loving you
And wonder
What I might write
And I see you
Stopping our walk
To stand by a small tree
Holding a half-open
Magnolia blossom
Softly with both hands
Your eyes closed
Your nose deep in Heaven
Flowers
Are part of your religion
And you
Are part of mine

I know
By now
How sweet
Your honey
Can be
But knowing
Is not
As sweet
As tasting

Standing outside breathing
I watch a mole
Burrowing under the grass
Sending worms
Fleeing to the surface
Sometimes leaving the steady ground
Is the way to find it

The thing I like best
About this stream
Is that all my favorite places
Come and go

Just like a dog
I love you again
And again
But nothing
Truly repeats
Even what doesn't
Change about you
Changes

I saw a dog
Rolling on his back
In the grass
Deep in the bliss
Of scratching
I was certain
At that moment
He didn't know his name
His master or anything else
I will roll
In you like that
With everything I know
Set aside
But ready at a moment's notice

Wedding Poem 1

A tornado in Spring
Roots in change
And clings to nothing
No safe place
Is equal to its beauty
There is no safe place
To touch its beauty
So I say
Let safety rest
And take this for your teacher
Distance
Closeness
And risk

Wedding Poem 2

In July
It seems as if Summer
Will last forever
In January
Winter

I used to require
Distance
To feel love
Then I required
Closeness
Now I require
Both

Let the moon see
What's beyond that hill

Walking to work
On a cold Fall day
Unconsumed by particulars
Feeling into
The wholeness of my self
Something better
Is not better
And any road I'm on
Is the right one

Writing this poem
Late at night
I forget then remember
The Fall night outside

To surrender myself
Into wholeness
To cross that imaginary line
Will take everything I have

A windy New Year's Eve
Too nestled
After lovemaking
To move
To my bedroom
We stayed in hers
And let the midnight cheers
Weave in and out
Of strangely restful
Half-sleep

When I can't bear
To look in the mirror
I resort to cleaning it

All Summer long
The stray orange cat
Looked out of place
Prowling the park
Uneasy like a tourist

Now the ground
Is covered
With big yellow leaves
And she walks invisible
Easy like a native

Practicing T'ai-Chi
In the park
Stepping slowly
I watch the wind
Fill the air
With spinning seeds
The leaves too
Are teachers
Some hold tight
For weeks
Others let go
Now

Wind blows
A branch falls
Snap crash
Where I stood a moment ago
I remember now
I love you completely

Everything is in motion
Nothing stands still
What is called stillness
Is not opposing this

This mist
Is impenetrable
I've given up trying

Feel its wetness
On my face

For this
I love you
With all my heart
I walked with Death today
And was glad to be alone

Nothing
Begins this poem
And nothing
Ends it

I watch an ant
Drag the body of a butterfly
Across a mountain path
The three of us
Inseparable

If I had a choice
I'd rather remember
The heron's stillness
And perfect attention
Than how I turned to talk
And missed the strike

Oak leaves
Hold on
All Winter
Until Spring
When new growth
Finally pushes
Them out
And down
To earth

When we sit quietly
Looking into each other's eyes
I feel myself bend and sway
Between yes and no
Like branches in Spring wind

The presence of anything
Is a miracle
A trashcan
A chickadee
A sidewalk
A Fall breeze
Love is always here
It's me that comes and goes

Love is in everything
A dark light
Moving to find you where you look

On a walk with your father
A king snake
Black red and yellow
Disappearing into a pile of stones

On a walk with me
Sunlight
Flashing on the backs
Of two ravens flying

In a shady corner of the park
A cat toys with a mouse
Already dead
From above
A squirrel full of life
Scolds with everything it has

Your wholeheartedness
Is its own kind of wisdom
Little friend
Cry for your cousin
The trees will wait for you

A difficult
Uphill bike ride
And at our destination
A difficult
Uphill talk
Along the way
Baby ground squirrels
Tails straight up
Running fast
Across open rocky fields
From the sheltering shade
Of one tree to another

I remind myself
Don't do anything special
Don't ignore
Don't believe
Don't act yet
Just watch this
Like a cloud
It will move and open
Soon enough

Everyday now
The Fall wind
Stirs and scatters leaves
The fact of Death
Yours and mine especially
Stirs my love
Keeps it moving
Listening
Welcoming
Trembling
Opening
Alive

Summer has returned
My joints welcome the warmth
Opening and breathing
Standing in the shade
Feeling the truth
That every moment
Is my whole life

I jump
Arms stretched overhead
You throw a stick
Up into the branches
For tiny sweet Fall plums

Today's Fall rain
Swells the stream
Yesterday's leaves
Pushed a little farther

Sold my television today
Gave a sad man a good price
Who wins loses
Who loses wins

Her sweet kiss
Swells my heart
All around me
I hear Yes
Even the great rock
Sitting in the stream
Says it slowly

If you want to see
The little grey stream bird
Do its funny bouncing dance
Or jump in and out of icy water
On and off of slippery stones
Just wait awhile
If you want to hear its song
Wait a little longer

They could pass
For rocks
These little grey
Stream birds

Under a bridge
Startled by a trespasser
Three baby stream birds
Leap fluttering into the current

Somehow past two waterfalls
They regroup on a shady stone
Where with no hint of distress
Their mother continues feeding them

Watching this
Mountain stream
I remember Iowa
And how I used to say
The sky is my ocean

I love what can be seen
From a path
That leads nowhere
Beside but never touching
A rocky stream

I watch a heron
One foot in front of the other
Standing on a wet stone
Neck outstretched
Completely ready
The essence of attention

My practice and teaching
Cultivating energy
Stand
Breathe and move
Listening always
For what feels most deeply right
Follow that to wholeness

Spring sun
Rushing water
Dancing as always
Between worlds

I start again
On this Spring day
With another
Unconditional yes
For you

That tree
Your suffering
My love
An endless mystery
As each petal
Finds its way
To the ground

I meet a big brown snake
Sunning itself on an open path
I stroke its tail
And watch it slip
Effortlessly hissing into the grass

Slowly inevitably
The gates keep opening
Home in my skin
Home in my heart
Home in the world
Home in your arms

There's a moment
In a melting
Before the drops
Suddenly break free
When water loosens
And coats itself

I hold my claims lightly
Like the green leaf
That turns red
Falls
Turns brown
Disappears
And never stops living

Suddenly
In glimpses
My flesh
My self
Stillness
Humming back and forth
Between something
And something else

The Winter wind
Worked the tall trees
Over today
Some fell
But most
Twisted and rolled
Swaying
Not just back and forth
But in gentle circles

In Winter
I see shades and shapes
In the blue green hills
That will vanish soon
In the white light
Of Summer

Ahhhh...sweet sun
Sweet smells
February false Spring
I breathe you deep
Chances are
You'll soon be gone

Saying goodbye
To the season
Of having the park to myself
I welcome
The season
Of people everywhere

A dark light
Is moving through me
I wake up everyday
In a different world
Today's news
A bat
Flying about
At noon
The sun
Shining through its wings

Rather than pretend
To some specific identity
And commit
To its endless defense
What if I drop
Like a stone
Into the stream
And allow the splash
The ripples
The sinking
The tumbling
The changing
To be what they are

I am yielding
To the electric edge
Of love

Sometimes
Too slowly to see
Like rocks in a stream

Sometimes
Faster
Like sweet figs
Ripening with the Summer's end

Root, stem, leaf, flower
Mom, dad, me, you

What is this invisible presence
Supporting each thing
And everything
In being now
Exactly what it is
Moment to moment

I call it love
But whatever it is
I bow
To its electric edge

Watching a pretty Summer girl
I ask her a silly question
Just to stretch the moment a bit

Her image will stay with me
While my sadness and longing
Lay their claim

But so weakly now
For a deeper truer love
Of everything
Is already burning through

Ground squirrels
Meet
And sweetly press
Their paws
To each other's faces
Then scurry off
On their regular business

The world is full
Of madness and suffering
The Summer air has been hot
And full of forest fire smoke
Still, love grows where we let it
And today
Cool breezes
Falling leaves
And the shadows of clouds

A fire
That burns a long time
Is well tended

No sun today just low clouds
A thick white mist
Obscuring all but the closest trees
A light snow falling
Everywhere but where I stand
Under the park band shell
Watching the green-white lawn
And an old birch
Still hanging on
To a few hundred yellow leaves

When the right wind comes
The last leaves fall

As beautiful in the air
As on the tree
On the ground
As in the air

Ah, sweet figs
All at once
Fall is coming