

Short Poems

Volume Two

By Gene Burnett

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For T-Poe
And All the Ashland Poetry Slammers

These poems were written between March of 2006 and February of 2008. As with my earlier collection (Volume One), some were written as part of poetry dialogues with friends but most were not. My only self-imposed limitation is that my poems have to fit on a 4 X 6 index card. The total number of lines cannot exceed the number of lines on the card and I always write in my normal sized handwriting.

When I put together my first volume of these short poems back in 2006, I had just begun to read them out loud at our local Poetry Slam. I was encouraged by the results: I enjoyed sharing my poems, I scored reasonably well at the Slams, and other people seemed to like them. At the time I was reading older poems, mostly written before 2005. My first book was a collection of everything I'd written up to that point. It was a sort of "house cleaning" before embarking on a new round of writing.

This book represents almost two years of fairly consistent writing. I teach T'ai-Chi and am also a singer/songwriter. During this same period of time, I've had a kind of creative renaissance: I've written two books, one on T'ai-Chi and one on songwriting, recorded 5 CD's and written over 60 new songs. I've had some prolific streaks in my life, but nothing quite like this! My major focus has been on T'ai-Chi and songwriting, but something keeps me writing these short poems as well. I'm not sure why but I continue to love this particular form.

My inspirations usually come from Nature, love and relationships, but this newer group reflects more general philosophical observations as well. I jot down ideas and insights as they come to me, and then later when I'm in the mood to write, I pull these notes out and see what I can do with them. When I read my poems at Poetry Slams I generally go up on stage with a stack of all the poems I've written so far and then pull ten or so out at random. I find this is more pleasing to me than over strategizing about which ones to read. These poems came to me as bursts of mysterious inspiration and I want the readings to happen in a similar way.

As usual, I hope you enjoy these poems and feel inspired to write some of your own and share them with your friends and community.

Gene Burnett
Ashland, OR
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Early on 13 years ago
One night after making love
You asked me straight
Are you the one?
Yup I said
HmMMM...you replied

I know
It goes against all your training
So thank you
For not punishing me
For disappointing you

Every day
There is less in the way
Of loving
You

If monkeys had television
Don't you think it would look
About the same as it does now
Food sex and power struggles
Well guess what
They do

Squirrels play
Chasing each other
Through the trees
My whole body smiles
And there is no room
For anything else

In my world
There is no such thing
As bad weather

You can talk
And talk
And I know just one thing
What's important to you
Is what you're doing
Not what you talk
And talk about

I am an absolute relativist
No God
No Devil
No good
No evil
Only relatives

If you have an answer
To the question
How did I get here
That isn't
I don't know
You must be
Out of your mind

I don't rush
To get
Where the action is
The action is me
Now
Doing what I'm doing
My real life
Is not coming
It's here

Snow holds the trees in place
Layers of fog and mist
Come and go
Something
Is dripping somewhere
And I have the park
To myself

Everything
Is around here
Someplace

Our restless dreams
Come
And go
Meanwhile
Nature
Takes care
Of everything
If you're not relaxed
You're not
Paying
Attention

Your face
Those clouds
This wind
Beauty
And conflict
Are everywhere

I am treading water
Breathing watching
Waiting for the right wave

Your ears
Are a rarer gift
Than my mouth
So thank you
Thank you
For listening to me

Those leaves aren't the only things
Waiting for the right wind
To fall

You think this tribe
Will last forever
But it won't
You will disband
And become individuals
Never again this important to each other
Never again so entwined
In each other's joys and pains
Never again quite so alive
In quite this way

Well I missed that boat
And I'm not swimming out to it now
I'll watch it sail away
And then I'll go home

You tell me about the lizard you saw
How it ran high up a tree
Up to where the sun
Warmed the bark
And how
Once there
It's triumphant territorial push-ups
Made you smile

I smile too
As we both bow
In spirit
To great explorers
Everywhere

If you have it in you
You can be bored
Anywhere

The only difference
Between me
And someone who's going somewhere
Is that I'm not

You are weak
Somewhere
There is something
You cannot say no to
So please
Go easy on me
For giving in to mine
Since you
My friend
Give in to yours

I've always had a soft spot
For smart girls
With problems

This I've learned from dogs
Don't hide your feelings
Unless you have to
Always give 100%
To something in your life
And if you can't have
The object of your pleasure
Howl awhile
Then move on

I treat my mind
Like I would treat a dog
I give it plenty of air
Light food and love
I wouldn't dream
Of trying to keep it still

If dogs thought about
And worried over
Everything they did
They'd be people

My selfishness
Is like a dog
If I don't let it in
I can't keep an eye on it
If I don't let it out
It messes up my house

When love comes to you
And your disappointment disappears
There is nothing to break free from
And what is
Is all right
And worth working with

And something unwinds in me
Spreads out against no fear
And fills me to my fingers
With gratitude
And you are beautiful again
Smiling as only you can smile

Love is one disaster after another
First an earthquake
Then a tornado
Then a war
Then a surrender
Then a mirror
Then a grave

Whatever you hold on to you lose
Whatever you let go of you lose
Love wrecks all your plans
Until only love is left

You say feed me
I'm hungry
But I'm not interested
In feeding your hunger
I want to relax
Into something unforced
And mutual
So go feed yourself
And let's see
What happens next

Birds know the secret of life
And so do you and I
For a moment
When we give them
Our
Full
Attention

Some people
Like to be reminded
Of their animal roots
And some people don't
If you do
Maybe
We can become friends

Nothing is simple
Except
Everything

Even if
You've only got
A tiny space
In which to dance
Dance in that
Tiny space

He asked me
If I believed
In life after death
I said
Sure
Just not mine
This thing I call me
Is just a wet sponge full of memories
It has no independent existence
Now
How on earth
Could it survive my death

Every religion
Has its golden rules
Too bad this current case
Is always the exception

I cannot avoid intimacy
Everything I do
Brings me close
To something
All I can do
Is choose
Sometimes
What to be intimate with

They are pretty
They are cool
You are not

Don't fight it
Let them be pretty
Let them be cool

There is nothing more sad and sorry
Than someone trying to be pretty
Or trying to be cool

And there is nothing cooler
Than a comfortable ugly person

Right now
You're too busy
Kicking the shit out of life
To be of much use to me

I'll like you better
When life
Starts kicking the shit
Out of you

If you treat sex
Like a power tool
And do nothing but work
On your mechanics
And your bargaining positions
You will never be
Overwhelmed
Overcome
Or
Overjoyed

Sorry
But if you want me
To believe that lie
You're going to have to
Believe it yourself first

Why is it so easy to say
This is who I am
And
This is how it is
And so hard to say
This
Is just what I'm experimenting with
Now

The bad guys have already won
Fight them if it feels right
But don't fight thinking you can win

They will always get their wars

But you
You can always move
Towards whatever happiness
You can find

You can always do that

Water doesn't wait
For the stones to wear away
Before it flows downstream
It just does
And in so doing
Wears away the stones

This
Apparently
Does not last too long

The first music we heard
Was not drums
Or singing
It was wind
Waves
Birds
Thunder
Footsteps
Breath
Heartbeats

My favorite music
Is wind
Blowing through
Bamboo leaves
Just before the rain

Necessity
Is the mother of existence
What doesn't need to be
Isn't
There is obedience
In every movement

Today
I agree with everything
Even if I could
I would not change a thing
Let the spring come
When it does

It's not exactly pleasure
That I want
But rather
The replacing of myself
With wonder
With the wonder word
Wow
Would anyone pursue
Religion pornography love art
Profit or crime
Drugs or flowers
If there was no stopping you
If there was no
Wow

Our trail turns and there it is
In a hole at the bottom of a tree
Why is a beehive so hypnotic
As a child I feared them
Gradually like a bear
I learned to associate them
With honey and mystery
Now we stand smiling
Watching
As bees rise and fall
Like ashes from a campfire
All around us

I don't want my town
Too nice
I like some nuts around
People who preach to walls
People who raise their voices in banks
People with wild ideas
People who remind me
That life is not controllable
For long

All art
Is like writing in water
Taking an idea from the air
And making it just a bit more solid
A bit more visible
Or hearable
Or touchable
For a few more moments
Before being swept downstream

My philosophy
Is like a parachute
It softens my landing
But I will still land
I will still die
And I will still
Not know anything
For sure

It's better
To write a bad poem
Than no poem

It's the writing
That heals you
Not the poem

You're not holding yourself back
By pushing yourself down
You're holding yourself back
By pushing yourself out

Whether you follow pleasure
Or follow pain
You cannot help
But arrive
Again and again
At the mirror
Of yourself
So follow what you want to
And I'll see you
When you get there

Still your mind
Says the guru

Mind your still
Says the hillbilly

Your mind? Still?
Says me

As a child
My heart was bigger than I was
And I fell in love with life
As an adult
I became bigger than my heart
And I fell out of love with life
Now when I shrink
And my heart swells
I feel like I'm bringing a love story
Into a garden

Sometimes I feel
Like a bee
Gathering pollen
From a flower
Floating
At the bottom
Of a well

It is a very cold morning
But the red berries
Are finally ripe
And so
The robins and waxwings
Have come to feed

Not only
Are we all monkeys
But we're all on drugs
All of us are medicated
On something
Some chemical
Some relationship
Some identity
Even naked
We're always wearing something
Carrying or leaning on something
For a bunch of monkeys on drugs
I think we're doing pretty well

Everything is medicine
For something

Everything is sacred

And anything
Will lead you
Into the purest mystery
If you follow it
Long enough

That body
Will definitely
Get people close to you
But only
Who you are
Will get them
To stay

You saw an opening
And you took it
Now
Did you create the opportunity
Or did the opportunity
Create you

You feel better now
You have decided
They are after dreams
While you
Are after truth

I don't think either exists
But I am glad
You feel better
And I will be glad
Eventually
When you feel worse

When I was young
My love was like an arrow
It sought her heart
And her heart alone

Now
My love is like a pancake
Spreading slowly out
Towards the edges of everything

I have to stop now
I've gone as far as I can go
Without faking it