

A-Train Blues

Poems and Such

by Eric Cecil

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

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Manufactured in the United States of America.

— *for Dad, Mom, Aunt Michael, and Jeff*

“Tonight we are recording
and of course you are
an integral part of our endeavor.”

— Dexter Gordon, from *Take the A-Train*

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Part One

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Prologue: Reflections Before 5:00
— for Leon

I couldn't find a highway rest stop or gas station the night I was arrested so I pulled over on the roadside, relieved myself and got back in the car. The Beatles were playing, and — there is absolutely no way you can possibly understand, but — while Paul was singing his song, I looked ahead, thought about the road behind and began to cry.

On the morning of September eleven, it was a beautiful clear blue day in Kentucky. I was lying in bed at nine in my tiny one-bedroom off Leader Avenue, a short hurried walk to campus, minding my own business, staring at the ceiling without any worries, daydreaming about a girl.

I was in love, waking slowly, taking my time, fully opening my eyes, abiding in a healthy all-around feeling. I was enjoying the serenity so much I decided to let the answering machine pick up when the telephone rang. It was my mother; she was frantic — something about explosions around the country. I threw off the covers and answered the phone in my underwear.

I had two writings under my belt and those first two I really enjoyed. Time felt infinite. Looking back, I didn't know what I was getting into. I wonder, had I known, would I have gotten involved?

On my way to becoming a lonely radical poet, a professor who had assigned a book to be read, which I did not read, asked, "Mr. Cecil, what did you think of *The Best War Ever*?" Straight-faced I said, "I believe the best wars are those that are never fought." He threw back his head, laughed and pointed out that I had dodged the question, which I had, but he was nevertheless pleased with my answer; I was in school to learn to think fearlessly.

In the heart of intellectual thought, I gave readings at a college coffee shop three or four times — I can't believe I used to do that, but it was the only way to vent, to stay sane, the only way to live. One night I walked out of Common Grounds after a reading that didn't go well. No one cared about anything except getting a degree, a job and getting more instead of enough. That night they seemed too busy to listen. I would just have to write a four-page essay every week, read it every week, and boom! — instant peace movement in Lexington, Kentucky. So I thought, on my way out the door to the bar down the street.

I was ready to start a movement, but the oldtimers were no help. I wrote them asking for help, needing help, willing to take help, but they wouldn't

see me, wouldn't write me, wouldn't give me the time of day. The twilight of old age had set in; anti-establishment became establishment when lavished with praise.

I was idealistic, black-and-white cement-ridged ready to argue. I would lecture friends on the phone about how violence leads to violence, of the benefits of nonviolence — consumed by righteous indignation, which in the end, became my only friend. The people who loved me didn't know what to think or what to say. I always refrained from telling them their point of view was flat-out wrong.

I was busy with ideas during the summer of 2002. I was better than the praise, but just not good enough for the love. I was a writer in the sense that my first name was Mr. and my last name was Writer. I reached the peak of the writing mountaintop by the fall of 2002 and thought I was ready to be heard by the world so I decided to see a professor in Virginia.

I stopped in Lexington, from Louisville, manic, in love again, but with a different girl. We had lunch beneath a cool September sun, under a sickly shadeless tree on the grass in front of her law school; we wore hip sunglasses and easy smiles; I was The Writer, she was The Girl... and I pause today to remember that — those — obsessed delusional relationship(s).

A friend, who has since disappeared, discerned the insanity of showing up unannounced at the door of a well-known professor and talked me out of making that Virginia trip. So that night I read at the coffee shop and afterward went to an Irish bar, where I got drunk and was praised as "becoming quite the poet."

I'm twenty-seven now and wonder what it's like to be young and have the material things many my age lust after. I also wonder what I've been doing with my life, judging success by my bank balance instead of by the lives I've touched.

I feel bottled up in a trap, awake all night, tossing, shivering, afraid, turning, gripping the covers, sheets coming untucked, an unsound mind racing nonstop — I would trade anything for a good night's sleep and yesterday's dreams. I don't know if I care anymore about war or peace, or if my convictions matter anyway.

•••

The Abstract

— for Dr. Joanne P. M.

It is very difficult to look at the emergence of “the Old South” without acknowledging the agricultural economy that formed a society, which out of labor needs gave birth to the institution of slavery. But to simply say the economy bound the south together would be erroneous. Following the civil war the south was forever changed, yet the agricultural economy remained the same. In fact, it would also be misleading — and I use the word “misleading” liberally — when I state the south was not bound together by slavery.

What bound the south together was the legal system of slavery. Shifting through the sands of American history we can see the importance that law has had on our nation. To paraphrase President Lincoln’s 1861 Inaugural Address, the Constitution was a legal contract that the involved parties could not break unless all parties consented. George Washington wrote in 1786 “that there is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of slavery, but that the only one proper and effectual mode for accomplishing this would be through the legislature.”

Those slave laws and codes spun by the poisonous spider of slavery caught the south in an unjust legal web that became unique to that region of the country. The slave codes that emerged from Virginia in the 1660’s quickly spread. These laws differed only in severity and regularity in which they were enforced, for their aim was essentially the same: to legalize and perpetuate slavery.

This, of course, is not to say that states such as Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and other northern states did not become entangled in the legal institution of slavery, because they did. But starting with Pennsylvania in 1780, northern states broke free from slavery by legally abolishing it. Looking at slavery as a legal institution one can clearly see the emergence of the Old South, which was comprised of those states that enforced slavery through legislature and law. Washington was right when he said that slavery would be abolished through legislation, which came in the form of the Thirteenth Amendment.

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An Irish Blessing

May daisies, sunflowers and hummingbirds lead to her heart...

•••

In the Studio
— for Beau

It's about James Baldwin and Sonny's Blues.
It's about emotion and sharing a conversation.
It's about finding the right key.
It's about the snare drum and the stand up bass.
It's about Lady Day, Ella and The Divine.
It's about Wes, his thumb and ear.
It's about Miles, his tone and the Trane's tenor,
not the one heading east going click-e=t-click-e=t-click-e=t-clack,
that's just rhythm which is everything.
It's New Orleans, Chicago and it's part of Harlem's Renaissance.
It's about the back door knock and flappers
stop smoking cigarettes when the big band stops.
It's about love, loss and a longing to be loved.
It's not about wearing bebop clothes,
but about hip lingo dressed for attitude.
If it's not right on, it's just a spin,
if it's just a spin don't try and jive,
and if you can dig that you're as cool as Miles.
Hey young cat what's your scat daddy-o?
I hope it cooks...

•••

January 1 - April 1, 2003
— for Bob T.

Tossing, turning and cradling in the wake of depression. It comes in the morning as sunlight eases into my bed temporarily awakening me before i turn over and sleep till noon.

In my covers and underwear i turn my aching stare outside as another empty afternoon goes by beneath an ocean capped sky and the sun hangs high blinding my bloodshot eyes while i feel threadbare worn through and beaten like a cheap rug that has been thrown on trampled ground.

Unable to fall back to sleep i leave the safety of my twisted blue sheets and shuffle like a weak wrinkled man into the laundry littered bathroom, stand bare-chested half clad in cotton boxer-briefs as i look into a mirror searching my haunted eyes before brushing my teeth.

i spit in the sink and all over the faucet, turn off the cold-water knob, pull myself out of the mirror, walk back into my bedroom and search for my red and green plaid bathrobe and slip into a pair of never-used black dress shoes and i open the back glass porch door and cough on the day's first inhale of nicotine feeling skin and bones, lightheaded, pale and green.

i come back inside after throwing my smoldering cigarette aside and it misses the half-filled coffee can, i kick off my black dress shoes, walk woozy measuring my steps back to the bathroom, feel hopeless as i undress throwing my underwear in a pile and i test the water before i step into the shower and try to wash away yesterday.

i step out dripping beads of water and feel chilled like a dead fish on ice as i pick up a towel from the floor, dry and walk naked into my bedroom to find a clean pair of black underwear and pick up yesterday's and tomorrow's blue jeans while i look for a sweater that will hold me warm against the weather and i'm dressed and it's not yet one in the afternoon.

i carry my weight up carpeted dark stairs, open a cabinet, pull out a chipped white bowl, pour some cereal and milk for breakfast or is it lunch?

i walk into the television room and there's nowhere to be all day long and tomorrow will be the same because i'm unwanted for hire and poor without coin so i sit down without a light on and turn on the television and my shrouded imagination? Today there will be no resurrection as i watch the war news i'm confused and let down by man-made leaders but i watch obsessively.

8 — *A-Train Blues* — Eric Cecil

Outside the blue sky begins to rage, the air has changed and it's turning into the coldest rain while i exhale trembling my lips i close my eyes unable to hide or move feeling so inescapably blue as i remember the past my thoughts jump into and slide through the nonstop ticktock-ticktock-ticktock of a brass chime clock as i envision countless fallen faces that have drifted away like white wind-caressed wilted petals and as i remember a fading conversation a lone tear trails down my face.

In a lazy boy chair i fight for my life which is devoid of an ounce of joy and i feel run down from wasting time, from doing nothing but i sit still and baby-rock a little while i chew my shirt and bite my lip an anguished moan escapes my withering soul and nothing will ever change my diagnosis is not unclear but terminal and finally i've been broken down and it's a little past two in the afternoon before i wonder if i can get through another day while i distantly smile and wipe away another tear.

•••

Reincarnation
— for Sam

Facing the sun,
touched by the wind,
stands an empty wooden corn crib,
intoxicated with time
falling back to the earth.

•••

Miles Behind
— for Jeff and Greg H.

They'll never see you like that no matter how much you want They to be We, We as in encompassing, We as in humanity, We as in a sentence, live on this earth. They'll never see the two scars underneath your chin, the scar on your knee, the scar on your thigh, and they don't care about the broken collar bone and two broken permanent front teeth in the first week of sixth grade and they weren't there for the cracker jack peanut you put up your nose or in the emergency room on Mother's Day when you hit your head on the Oldsmobile's ashtray or for the soccer ball that hit that popsicle stick dead on, that you found on the ground and put in your mouth and they won't care that the doctor said to your mother that if someone had a little more leg you would have died spitting blood, and they'll never see your tattoo or know that your face flushed pale as that needle buzzed the outline — cutting into your stomach — coloring in the design.

They weren't there when you were waist-high to hear your father tell you to shoot for the stars or you'll never reach the moon or hear your mother tell you that if you don't take a stand now you'll be running for the rest of your life. They'll never know who turned up at your house on a Friday night in a black Impala to give you courage or how long it took you to decide to burn your and their Greek letters and party shirts so you could gain back your self-respect while choking on the smoke not knowing where you'd go to school or work until you went back to school. They don't know what it felt like to see your name in the newspaper article sitting on the table in Kroger's break room or how exhausting it was to have your life picked apart for four-and-a-half hours by eight lawyers who were only doing their jobs. They weren't with you sitting in that soft tan limousine middle seat with your brother riding beside you, his arm around you while you looked out empty at the windows of the businesses on Bardstown road with your tears miles behind. And they weren't there when you played the same role at your Uncle's funeral five years later five years to the exact day five feet away from your sister's grave leaving behind your red rose and when they say "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger" remember to tell them, that's what they say, because you know from sorrows and losses there is always a choice to become a bitter person or a better person which depends entirely upon your reflections.

They'll criticize you for your honesty and openness with their stares and silence with their repeated questions and politeness. They'll tell you that you would be a good speechwriter if you just tone down the emotion and use punctuation right before you tell them you didn't know you were running for office and that politicians should be able to write their own words. Lincoln did; he used his emotions and mood swings. And they won't believe you when you tell them you don't know the first thing about writing because you flunked your last writing class two-and-a-half years ago drunk as a blown month's rent with your hand and hangover around a Maker's Mark bottle.

They'll never know that you think Sarah Vaughan has the most beautiful voice or that Pat Martino's "We'll Be Together Again" is the slowest sexiest jazz you've heard and they'll think you're crazy because you honestly believe that the best five minutes of acting on the silver screen came from Sylvester Stallone in Rambo First Blood in the second-to-last scene when Troutman says "It's over, Johnny, it's over." They'll never know that you and a friend have fictional fans from your fictional band named the Freewheelin Man and the Strong Armed Cece and you don't write lyrics and during rehearsals you only play the air drums while the Freewheelin Man's Band only covers the first few lines of a few eighties songs that get sung like Robert Plant feeling half dead just rolled out of bed smokin' a cigarette lookin' for a glass of wwwwaaattteerrr!

They'll never know that when you invented the fist of peace you were making fun of a flagrant racist who touches knuckles with everyone except half his brothers or that sometimes when you proofread you pace in circles and it's doubtful if they'll ever know that imagination which makes the world spin also runs over you and that is a blessing and a curse.

They won't see and won't know your hopes and fears, your dreams and insecurities, your tears and blood you shed and spilled in yesteryears and even then you still want They to be we, We as in unity, We as in a sentence live together, We as a people will love each other and We will make the changes necessary so that We as human beings can one day barter peaceful solutions to the problems We all face.

•••

An Innocent Daydream
— for the Grandparents

Sometimes I...

can barely believe I was ever so young and naïve,

a little boy,

still tugging on my father's shirtsleeve.

Hardly remember those brother-sister powwows

dressed in yesterday's forgotten fallen feathers

as three redheaded Indian chiefs.

Easily forget the feel of sunlight's touch after being

tucked away, soundly sleeping until

the sun breaks day.

Fail to perceive that my eyes can still see

from the tops of trees and

my bare feet can still meet

the fresh-cut fragrance of summertime's grass.

Can't fathom being six years old,

with my breath condensing on a window,

wide-eyed, marveling at the slow falling snow.

Strain to hear the eloquent spring testimony of

early morning song birds.

My nose refuses to retrieve the smell of blooming blossoms

lingering in spring's enchanting breeze.

But sometimes,

when my leather-bound feet,

protected against the rock concrete and glass slivered sprinkled streets

carries me into the sun and the whispering winds

urge me to close my eyes...

Oh! how I can remember...

My sister, young healthy and alive,
curly red hair blazing, blue eyes beaming sibling pride
as she holds my hand, kisses me and tells me
she loves me before waving goodbye.

My father walking through the illuminated back porch
through the anxious back door pausing to kiss my mother,
before holding us.

I remember,
running through my Grandfather's annual garden
salt shaker in hand with hungry eyes,
looking past rows of corn, summer squash, okra, horseradish,
before finding the perfect sun-burnt tomato.

The summer camp... Grandparents standing hip-to-hip
arms behind, intertwined, the sun quickly deliciously dropping behind
Indiana's piece of the Ohio River... playing the goodbye game,
"Nightrider" "Nightlight" "Bicycle" "Biweekly" "Vaya con Dios."

The Ashley Court House, knee deep in creek concentration
with my brother Jeff and cousin Danny slowly lifting rocks
in muddy waters dangerously searching for Crawdad Big Claw.

Long bumpy rocky road hayrides on the
ancestral Marion County family farm
hoping I would one day be old enough to stand on the hitch,
holding tight to the paint-chipped tractor seat
like one of my many uncles.

Occasionally my mind begins to peacefully drift above
the shifting rough waves of adulthood and
I spend a few minutes with an innocent daydream.

•••

Blues in the Key of "A"

Pull out my notebook... search for a pencil.
Intending to fill the cramped shaded illuminated glow with rushed
hand-written words of love and peace.
Writing... trying to be subtle... my words! my words! my words!
— will not come to me.
Patience does, take out some old writings.
A love letter... my heart's been absent.
My love in a painstaking letter,
accompanied by a tea light green candleholder with four half-dollar glass
chiseled dragonflies that decorated its squared sides.
I was later accused of being dramatic,
which I denied, and of having a photographic memory.
Continue reading it's contents... stop... page and a half to go.
I know it ends... Love Always... but always comes and goes.
That's part of life... that's part of the blues.

...

What Day Is It?

Perhaps it's best I forget what I felt was radiating from her blues and her hair, her lips and the small of her back and the comfort I found in her arms and around her. I might as well forget about her breasts and her hips and her magnificent shapely legs and it's probably best most importantly if I forget about her kindness and soft words and assurance and her caring, but I can't do all that right now.

Maybe I should take back the gift I was going to give that got ripped up and thrown in the trash and take her name from the title because she wiped a shine off the love I was beginning to feel and my hurt emotions... maybe I should do nothing except hurt with disappointment without making any decision and not take back something I decided to give in earnest, but I don't know anything today.

I'm hopeful for some reason, it's only a feeling and would like to imagine our lives will cross again, but right now I don't know if it will be raining or shining or clear or cloudy, only some tomorrow on an unturned calendar and I don't know when or how but I think I'll know then if I'll be ready to forget or give back what I intended for her.

...

Sunflowers

I have tried to do this many times on different occasions in the years apart but I've never found the words. My sister, sweet Molly, I'm going to try to find the courage just one more time and I know you will lead me, for I remember a certain promise you made moaning while I asked crying.

Night has fallen, outside it's warm middle May, and a young boy who over the past three-and-a-half years has become a man, has seen suffering, comes to his sister's bedside in the family room. Furniture has been rearranged to make room for the hospital bed and she is peaceful with closed dark sunken eyes that were once treasures but now she is no longer able to eat and hasn't for close to one week and her face is gaunt, her arms are delicate twigs and her close friends, her boyfriend and her family all know but haven't begun to try to understand, it will not be much longer, so they are gathered at her home, at her mother's home, her younger brother's home, at that young man's, her youngest brother's home.

Yesterday I met Mom, Granny and Granddad at your graveside. Granddad stayed inside the car in pain, but in surprisingly good spirits and Mom walked Granny using her arm to support her. Granny walked around a little while I watered your thirsty flowers at the base of your black stone. I sat down on the July brown grass as Mom and Granny sang "Happy Birthday." They just looked at each other and started to sing on time, as if first counting in and then Granny saw the sun carved into your stone and Mom said, "Remember, Mother, she had that tattoo of a sun." And Granny said, "Where?" as she felt above her left breast. "That's right, and Eric has a sun also." "Where?" And I lifted up my shirt and showed her my middle right stomach. I walked Granny back to the car as I heard Mom crying.

The mother of the young woman is exhausted as any mother would be, watching her daughter, her child, her first child, her only daughter linger for so long. The nights have been full of horror for her and for the loves of that young woman. A few nights before, the father of that young woman was awakened late. He set down the phone and woke his two sons and those three men came over fast and all watched waiting, as she convulsed, all helpless, all under the unwavering glow of God whose love is not helpless. Weeks before when she was screaming in the still of the night, awakening her youngest brother who is a sound sleeper she cried to God to make it stop and her mother cried the same and it has.

Now the mother is at her end. The loves of that young woman are drinking beer to kill their pain, but some pain ends only with time and tears and lots of both; some pain will never go away. The time has come for them to leave. "This is our time, I'm sorry but this is our time." A dear friend who would later do an unforgettable favor asks the mother with all sincerity if he can stay in the garage. "No, I'm sorry." They leave one by one and the boyfriend who is more than just a boyfriend stays, and has stayed the nights and days before, because he loves her in a way indescribable except between him and her.

I got Granny in the car and slowed down my step a little because I know it's best to cry alone sometimes, so when I got back to Mom I just put my hand on her back and she turned, we hugged and she cried a little on my shoulder. While she did that I felt my eyes burn and water but nothing spilled down my face, it's been a while. We walked around the cemetery, looked at stones and Mom showed me where she is going to be buried and Dad will rest next to you. We left shortly after our walk... Molly... I still think you're beautiful... Love ya' babe, Eric.

The young man sits alone at his sister's bedside. It's not too late in the night and the father, mother, brother and boyfriend wait in another room or outside on the deck. There is one light on with a low-wattage bulb burning, some light music is playing and it's Pachelbel. The young man takes his sister's hand to begin putting lotion on her hand and arm. It's Elizabeth Arden's Sunflowers, and in years to come when he smells that lotion he will forever think of her. He stops, is grim and worried, but that worry will be over soon. He looks at her and begins crying. It is not the first and will not be the last time or the loudest, but he cries and cries and cries which he wipes away with a tissue from the box by her bed. He begins talking to her not knowing if she can hear him or has the strength left to hear him. He talks anyway and tells her things from his heart that is running down in floods. He thinks he will be without a Sister, yet he's wrong. He holds her hand, squeezes and she knows. He asks her if she will promise to watch over him. Her closed eyes slightly stir and she lightly moans moving her head ever so slightly while he stays at her bedside and talks and cries a little while longer.

Molly Rebecca Cecil

July 28, 1973 - May 26, 1995

•••

Brotherly Blues

Brothers love one another.
Brothers kiss one another,
because brothers have cried with each other
and brothers hug one another or shake hands with each other
because brothers will sometimes only have each other.
Growing up, brothers learn to speak for one another and
brothers run together whether it's July or October or April
or the coldest day or the hottest in May and brothers know how to find trouble,
have fought with each other, have suffered broken bones and swollen eyes
but brothers turn to their older sister
who knows how to console
and teaches them it's best
to sometimes
just let it go.

•••

Love

— for Sara Beth, Brittanie and Abbi

Love is a majestic voodoo child.
Her natural beauty is overwhelming.
Hair of the sun.
Skin of the earth.
Eyes of an ocean.
Breath of a slow October stir.
She will guide those through the war-torn desolate desert and
twisted steel metal wreckage safely to our oasis of peace and sanity.
Like all small children Love touches everything
she rests her eyes upon.
When Love touches people,
magic is created.
When Love touches the scrapes and cuts of a clumsy child,
healing begins.
When Love touches the tears of the crying,
laughter becomes possible once again.
When Love touches streams,
canyons are created.
When Love touches canvasses,
masterpieces are painted.
When Love touches the wind,
rugged rocks become smooth.
When Love touches the sunset,
soft hues of yellow, red and blue are born.
When Love touches empty hearts,
they become filled.
When Love touches broken friendships,
they are healed.
Love touches everything and patiently waits for
hatred to destroy what has been created
so she can then touch destruction.

•••

Blues in E-minor
— for Robin

I saw the golden angels of the sun decreed she should inherit intelligent locks of blond while amber emerald intermingling spirits of hope and compassion danced within her eyes.

Shall she care to remember hearing my nervous laughter weaving through the smoke-filled neighborhood bar night after night, perhaps she will see my love was shackled to a long past day of ambiguity.

“’Tis absence that makes the heart grow fonder,” wrote the poet. I absently spent last summer on the seventeenth green looking down upon a wild long grass flowering valley where meandering butterflies floated and on easy lazy days when the sun painted the twilight sky, I thought of her.

I did possess hidden passions that hoped to find God in the sweaty candlelight of the star-filled swirling night while feeling sensual delight.

But how beautiful were those passions when mixed with a barely irrepressible longing to be perched naked on the edge of her bedside watching the early morning sunrise, affectionately caressing her while the rise of sunlight’s tide washes away her midnight lullaby.

Now I will leave, but before, I once wrote to her, redemption in some context implies blame, but it also means a new beginning.

That gentle-eyed dark-haired bearded President once said, “Think calmly and well upon this whole subject; nothing valuable can be lost by taking time.”

I am writing to say that I hope this poem finds her well, that she can forgive me for our friendship’s farewell.

...

My Sisters

Born poor, the oldest of two girls, protested, marched and got jailed, taught in the West end... worked for its Community Council while she wore the Catholic black said my calling is elsewhere, dropped the habit, but never lost the faith.

Born dirt poor, the oldest of thirteen, seven boys and six girls, served the army for education; his green dress coat hangs behind my closet door.

She met my Dad at her sister's wedding while He met my Mom at his brother's wedding and I share both sets of grandparents with Julie who was first born, then my sister, then Katy, then my brother, then me and then Rachel who is the other play baby.

She and I were both conceived with a six pack of Old Milwaukee or with a pull-top of PBR or while our grandparents watched the other kids or after a hard day of work or on a weekend away or on a lazy Saturday, but from mistakes or accidents may come beautiful blessings.

Uncle Butch and Aunt Michael moved to Michigan and there were: water fights and toilet-papered trees, duct-taped outhouses and plastic-wrapped toilet seats, rung doorbells and broken eggs shells missing outside Christmas lights and once or twice police cruiser lights.

We are grown... our parents divorced long ago... they are my sisters. We have all explained many times over the years that the tree really does branch into a normal family history.

•••

Kentucky
— for Mark and Amy

In Kentucky you're coming or leaving home, or you're fixin' to or aimin' to.

There are two major cities in Kentucky.

Louisville is pronounced with two syllables and it's a nice place to live until you can leave. Lexington is dreadfully boring to visit, but a good place to try and get by in.

You all is pronounced ya'll in Louisville yawl in Lexington and y-a-w-l in the rest of the state.

The mountains are called hills which are beautiful and refreshing in the spring and summer, but dreary and lonely in the fall after trees shed and rain sets in offering solitude found only in isolation, but very few people actually live in the hills, they live in hollers and ain't got no is unfortunately correct English when referring to a job or money unless you work for a coal company or at the fillin' station or can pick a guitar or grow dope and Kentucky farmers know there's a difference between growing high and growing rope; in either case both are illegal but only one puts bread on the table.

In the country there are tobacco barns, livestock, strong forearms and lined faces tell you it's hard work that doesn't pay like it used to, but there's always hope in planting, the weather and next year.

Kentucky's a poor state with heartbreaks going back to when the settlers settled the Indians who considered Kentucky sacred ground. We had slaves in antebellum, the railroad ended at the Ohio and freedom began across the shore and when the civil war came Kentucky officially abstained but brothers fought brothers and brothers fought fathers... that's some of our sorrow.

If I ever have a daughter I might like to name her Kentucky, she'll grow up beautiful and misunderstood, sharp and forgiving, she'll know how to handle her losses, and besides I think Kentucky's a right pretty name.

...

Tree Lovers

dirty hands	plant seeds
grow trees	sapling trees
need rain	drought hits
carefully water	budding leaves
strong limbs	climb high
grown healthy	tulip poplars
picnic basket	picnic lunch
expensive cheese	red wine

love conceived
born spring
red yellow
orange gold
autumn leaves
falling leaves
piled leaves
children playing
laughing throwing
dusty leaves
beneath wind
blown moaning
naked laughing
october trees.

•••

Writer's Block

The artist concerned, frustrated, screaming, my palette is dry,
my music sheet has been written and the chorus sings of yesterday.

He'll never be this and he'll never be that.
He'll never write like this or ramble like...
He's not disciplined and or as brilliant as...
He's not as gifted as...
And this is the weight breaking his back.

An ancient reaper has slipped into his bed,
gleaming eyes of madness,
taking him over the waters of his lost memories,
into dreamless darkness every night without an idea to ponder over.

In the morning he fearfully asks,
"Why have you thieved my ideas?"
"Where has the passion gone?"
"Where has the energy gone?"

"Remember when we danced between falling raindrops.
And we watched a swan rise with mystical grace, wings stretching,
bringing light for the dead.

And we fell with her feathers like staring lovers suspended in time,
then floated, falling downward, like long-awaited prayers,
only to dissipate in the crossroads of a wind,
before landing exhausted in the heart of an old man,
in his final resting bed... only to rise again."

He's been thrown against a blank white wall and placed in chains of normality.
His imagination is in pain, starving and dying daily while desiring to be free.
He needs silence and his body craves the nearness of reality
brought by manual labor.

•••

He's vulnerable and ready to roll over, crying into the blinding sun with hands on his head, begging God for anything or everything, take my writing where it's capable of going.

Will I ever be able to write again?

*Will I ever capture the rhythm I still bear in my mind
while I drive down the road?*

*Nonsensical words strung together that have no meaning but I still bear
the measures and place the conjunctions.*

He has no beginning anymore, no end, not even a snippet of a punch line...
He has nothing.

•••

Papa David's Farm

glorious rustling meadow
golden floating leaves
overhead hanging geese
mild autumn air
natural open spaces
quilted patterned ground
frenzied speeding heart
angelic quickening breath
wobbly shaking knees
closed eyes fluttering
soft parting lips
careless waltzing tongues
bodies hold tight
late day thunderclouds
roaming lightning strikes
rain falls slowly
heavens roar deafening
into the night.

•••

Love Communicates Without Words
— for Dalton and Brinley

Walking through the little woods
down the street from the house on Weisinger,
my brother and I were blue- and green-eyed
redheaded children who weren't twins
and we had just discovered
the taboo vocabulary of profanities
and I've used several since then.

We were practicing extremely loudly.

Suddenly from out of nowhere
some man I never saw before
or again stopped us and said,
"I haven't heard language like that since I was a sailor."

I don't think I knew what language like that meant,
so when Jeff looked at him and said fuck you and ran,
for a dumbfounded half-second I stood there,
but then followed quickly behind...
laughing, cussing and running,
because love communicates without words.

•••

Untitled
— for Julie

I'm without a reason,
but this sunny afternoon
driving down the road
I listened to a sad blues
and thought of you.

Fine shoulder-length hair, the color of surf-touched beach,
green eyes framed by dark eyebrows and sometimes glasses,
but it wasn't the way you looked or your style,
it was your casual grace and the way you smiled,
your energy, your optimism for life,
it was the way you looked when you pronounced "ahh-qua"
beautiful and innocent, and it was your tattoo
of the sun on your right cheek
that you showed me without hesitancy
that drew me
and when we kissed,
only once,
but when we did
I dreamed I could laugh through
the darkest moon.

I thought very lovingly of you;
and it seems a little cruel,
I feel sadness for what never will be said,
but in the madness of the fraternity,
in the ashes of the haze,
I had a decision to make.

They sit gathering dust,
inside a blue sun-and-moon-decorated box,
inside of a shoebox,
buried beneath keepsake cards,
mile markers from where I've been,
and in no order,
mixed in,
a photograph of me asleep on your couch,
a handwritten note,
a birthday card from when I turned nineteen,
and two pink opened envelopes,
one sealed with a heart from Alabama.

I carry no flame —
your letters were long ago
thrown away,
for we both know
that to live in the past
is to die in the day —
so I must quickly close
but please know,
tonight I'll cast your name to the heavens,
with a slight twinge
from the memories
never lived.

•••

Gypsy Rose
— for Krys

I.

She left in her green four-door Accord,
rotating wheels onto the Gene Snyder,
only for a few miles before hitting Interstate Sixty-Four,
heading into the sunrise,
with her left arm out the window, even with the road,
her hand rolling waves, fingers ripple reaching into
the breeze that speeds at seventy-three-and
-two-thirds miles per hour,
driving away from the outskirts,
past tobacco fields into gentle sloping hills,
to the right and left are black fenced fields
where young foals throw their heads carelessly,
running carefree, galloping clumsily, while
bobbing their short coarse manes rhythmically.
She is passing a gray white mixed limestone rock wall
that chandeliers frozen icicles in mid-December,
only to thaw into running springs and by mid-March
the crevices grow green with wispy flowers surrounded by soft moist moss.
I've passed that wall countless times before the Kentucky river which runs,
turns and bends in slow curves like the road she drives on.

She takes her arm back from the wind, looks serious and straight-faced,
sunglasses shading her eyes from the sun.
Her heart he took a long year ago she found and mended and
when we talked last outside the coffee shop seated on the concrete, departing
car headlights spilled onto us,
leaving us for their garages or parking spaces while we smoked our cigarettes
and shared our insecurities: "I'm finally over him."
She is pulling into Lexington. I'm in Louisville and the mileage
doesn't begin to cover the distance we've given one another.

II.

I was slouched in a movie house. In my cup holder sits caramel
carbonated water which I drink through a red-and-white-striped straw,
while my friend sits forward, his forearms resting on his knees,
as I sit waiting but without anticipation.
I take one moment, one nervous sly smiling second of
complete and total possibility before lightly tapping him, telling him
I think I know her....

I take a long glance, an open stare,
her blonde hair had grown past her neck,
was resting on the blades of her back,
spilling down away from her eyes as she walked looking up... pausing,
walking past and looking down.

Seasons had passed, but we parted well,
me off to school, her off to Steamboat and its white slopes,
taking my faded olive-lime book of Contemporary American poetry
with Lowell's Memory of West Street and Lepke...
"Only teaching on Tuesday book worming
in pajamas fresh from the washer each morning."

Film credits roll, house lights turn on while I stand, stretch and yawn,
look behind, eyes adjust on her with her father and brother.
Her embrace was the smell of mock-orange blossoms riding slow sunsets,
of the sourwoods white bell-shaped flowers roaming twilight,
of a gypsy rose found in a wild daisy meadow
of a strayed memory finding home....

A summer day at the Reggae Fest on the waterfront.
I walk with a heavy heart from a triangle,
hesitant and unready to take my share of responsibility and suffer
certain heartache.
I stroll beside her — she wears khaki pants
and a white tank top — we walk, carrying on,
jokingly registering for a cruise,
claiming marriage,
then winning, then claiming divorce.

People clamored past breasting bags of seeds and drinks of melting ice.
We walked down the popcorn-littered aisle,
casually toward black-and-green-handled doors.
“I can’t do anything tonight.”
Being cool, wasting time, God knows I’m awkward,
“I’ll call you later in the week.”

The sun rose and darkness fell obscuring fiery stars filled with radiant hope,
morning broke and the sun sat in colorful coronation as the evening sky
faithfully departed to the ancient moon.
I called and she said, “I fell madly in love and he broke my heart.”
I hung up the phone, deaf, changed clothes and glasses for contacts
drove to Highland Coffee, found a table among the Bardstown Road beatniks,
one with pastels, oblivious, high on the art.
I waited with my right calf over my left knee, looked over...
and saw her smile and blue jeans.

We walked down a wooden ramp onto the sidewalk into the humid night,
crossed the street by swaying traffic lights, past silent cars, toward
Cave Hill Cemetery, where the departed rest calm and still,
as we did our best to fill in missing years.
“How’s your Mom?” “Good, she hopes to see you this summer.”

There were breaks and silences. Minds were elsewhere or tongues were tired,
but words forgotten bridge meaning to those that imprint into memory.
I wasn’t listening, but I heard her say,
“She invited him camping without me and he went.”
“I’m sorry.”

Sleeping guilt turned and rolled over — a best friend of hers,
not of an early-morning or late-night extreme, rather a reciprocal emotional
crutch with two moments of moist affections,
one drunk, one with sincerity;
all ended with her confessions.

I knew a different kind of emptiness within the heart,
unfulfilled, a physical ache, days spent within a daze.
We walked without words, and I never imagined her loss,
never saw torn tissues or water-bled eyes or heard her questions why.

At our cars she asked if I wanted to go to a bar,
“I can’t, I work in the morning.” “You’re not being subtle are you?”
“No, I’ll call you when I get back from Ireland.”
Ireland was my mother and graduation,
Saint Patrick’s cross and cathedral,
The claddagh ring: Love, Loyalty, and Friendship,
Ireland, a country European and green, stacked rock walls beside
narrow harrowing roads with sheepdog trainers
and friendly store shopkeepers who lived in stone-and-thatched
houses on Aran Island and social-clubbed in Celtic craic-filled pubs,
rosy-faced drinking pints of Guinness for strength.
Ireland was island-sky gray as unwashed wool,
Galway Bay from an eight-foot window,
the inspiring quiet cliffs of Mohr.

Ireland was an exquisite road trip, including very Catholic Anne telling me,
“Oh yes the O’Daly’s, they were the bards, teachers and horse thieves.”
I packed a souvenir suitcase after ten days into a miniscule gray hatchback
and from Shannon to Dublin, Dublin to Chicago, Chicago to Cincinnati,
jetlagged, drove home on Interstate Seventy-One before finally sleeping
in my mother’s home.

I reached her answering machine and days passed impatiently.
I dialed emptiness again, mornings marched and night fell loneliness in blankets
which she peeled back on a Monday.
I was late to her house and Shakespeare’s in the park under a gloomy blue sky.
The sunset blackened and cried at the play,

but had finished by the time we ate ice cream and she watched me,
very closely, speak very slowly.

“I never should have been in that situation. I shouldn’t have allowed...”

“As long as you learned from it.”

“Oh I learned.”

Days filled with thought and at a baseball game, it was lucky seating,
front row right field behind first base,
sandals disappeared while we threw idealisms back and forth.

We shared photographs on a Saturday over coffee, and as I watched her read she
mumbled her approval while pointing to an explanation point.
She saw me only on paper.

We drove separately to Patrick’s near the train tracks on Frankfort;
listened to an east-bound whistle sound while we sat on white plastic deck chairs.
By the time we drove to Joe’s in Lyndon and sat across a wooden picnic table,
she was talking to someone about Dylan and Maya.
I don’t know about that, but when I looked at her....

Time passed with phone tag before my cousin and I dined at Azalea.
I remember her, hair pulled back windswept blonde, face without makeup
black server pants walking to the bar and when she saw me,
her smile was as wide as an unending prairie.
That is how I remember her.
I mailed her, for I miss her, as now.

III.

On the road, in between, she has me in hasty poems;
written with the care of an overworked machine.
She left holding them close, clutching them near her heart.
My emotions... waiting for the end of the winter freeze,
for the rains of Spring, for the clouds to clear.

It’s late, I’m tired... my mind drifting, dreaming, drifting...
seemingly dreaming alone...

Leaving behind growing concern in the vapors of exhaust
while turning off Virginia Avenue where she stands wearing
a solid blue-and-cracked-letter University of Kentucky sweater
with open arms glowing from the shadowing memories of yesterday's
summer, welcoming me to the red-and-golden-leafed fall.

Dreaming drifting, the gunmetal sky goes by and in a canoe,
the aged wooden oars drip tears onto the water top,
and floating leaves fall slowly
as I run my hands through her hair under the moonlight,
against the sound of September cicadas.

Dreaming drifting, like two doves in through the cotton candy clouds,
landing and leaving black-scarred pavement.
She and I walk with a weekend carry-on
and a suitcase apiece.
Drive a clean car to a mom-and-pop grocery
and state-run liquor store with a windshield glare from the
early-October South Carolina sun,
that later reflects from a pier while the ocean sways,
throwing mist against the barnacles of its wooden legs.
Dry sand clings around the ankles while foam waves creep and recede,
washing away footprints of those before while her eyes explore faded stars
marking the starlit runway for a disappearing shooting sibling.
Her lips are soft, moist, and honey.

We reach a wooden-slat fence lining
sand dunes growing rustling sea oats next to a
seaside shanty while wind haunts past cloth drapes
and on a table sits a bottle of Irish whiskey,
a canister of whipped cream and a bag of ground coffee beans.
Slowly standing from the table,
eyes chasing thrown clothing,
bracing the banging coil screen door,
breathlessly breathing,
feet sinking in sand,
quickly running nearly stumbling momentarily pausing,
unbalanced unbuttoning shorts,

running full-speed like a freed chimpanzee,
spattering feet onto the moving beach,
into the cold and liquid snow,
she turns sarcastically sour from thrown water,
before smiling and swimming next to me.

Drifting dreaming,
walking in a Red River Gorge Eden green valley,
songbirds singing wind-woven melodies,
treading through a trickling mountain stream,
carrying water and wax-papered sandwiches in a patched backpack,
climbing, resting and sweating while listening to silence
on a barren rock-shale mountain top.

Drifting dreaming,
on a farm close to the edge of the night,
under heavens of opals,
we stare wide-eyed at a bonfire,
billowing smoke across a field
spotted with hay bales before rain howls,
matting her hair as we retreat into a borrowed unzipped tent.

Dreaming, drifting, nearly dreaming in the darkness
on a firm mattress and from a cracked window
blows a chill from coming November and under
a thin sheet I feel her skin shiver before I fall asleep,
dreaming with love.

•••

Simple Songs
— for Eddie

From now on I might write about simple things, wonderful things, like children laughing carrying on, arms out, eyes closed in dizzy ecstasy under the shadows of passing clouds.

April rain and rolling fields of blue green spring in Kentucky, spotted by trees that sound at dawn.

The glorious summer heat that melds your comfortable cotton shirt to your back, God's fury that seems to melt the blacktop clean off the pavement in a sight of unforgiving haze and humid mirage.

The feel of crisp fall morning on my face, reminding me of college and cold football games played in the sinking sun in Lexington, freedom, days spent nursing books, principles and ideals.

Ah yes! simple songs, the clean sweet smell of bales of straw at the local produce stand, vendors selling advice on planting, pumpkins, corn fodder, and autumn red, yellow, and golden mums planted in the morning sun in barren flower beds yearning for tomorrow's sunlight of resurrection.

The farmer's almanac winter advice: they say you better slow down, look around, walk outside and run your fingers through the frozen frosted ground, velvet glass in the mid-morning sun, and look at the sight of your own breath reminding you that you're alive.

•••

Shhh! Peaceful

Sunlight beams welcoming while opening flat stained wooden blinds dust spirits ghosts peacefully float, coffee pot drips drifting awaking senses pour a cup sugar cream morning paper, *tap tap tap, pack pack pack*, cellophane and foil unwrapped gone, step outside... glorious... reach for a light... hope for a cure.

I read the headline: Jerusalem. I instantly decide to ignore yesterday's tragedy filled news by wasting half a day away putting personal items away, moving toward my great grandmother's knee-high hand-carved removable glass top antique serving table settled heavy with books, searching past Baldwin's "The Fire Next Time" and his short fiction "Going to Meet the Man," with its flipped aged yellow-paged musty library scent, the colossal collected poems of the simplistically brilliant bard Langston Hughes...The Bhagavad-Gita.... the Great Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe.... The drought-dry political writings of Jacques Rousseau... Wilson Rawls' "Where the Red Fern Grows" ... some Henry David Thoreau... find what I'm looking for...out of curiosity for the context of... love thy enemy. Light a candle incense breathe focus and finish. Play Wes Montgomery, off on a tangent, stretching out with three cats "Smoking at the Half Note" his heart, mind, his soul speaking improvisational sliding dripping energy.... What a tone! What a tone! Check my wristwatch picturing the manically depressed Mr. Jimi Hendrix sporting an enormous afro dressed in blues hippie clothes and I'm late. I telephone a Nashville jazz house. I'll be there by eight.

I throw a change of clothes into my grey frayed knapsack containing my tattered notebook and a crumbled coffee-stained road map that will guide me into a lovely sunset that aspires to surely rise on a better tomorrow for an anxious camera with innocent film that longs to surprise and capture still the better sides of mankind.

My car keys jingle, inserted ignition turning, oil gasoline mixture burning, rubber wheels slowly turning, slowly driving past identical white picket fenced extraordinary suburban dreams, moving down pristine streets, turning south onto a freshly paved interstate highway, passing a bright bordered hunter fluorescent orange sign — end construction — passing farms plowed by John Deere tractors as semi-psychedelic Miles Davis begins to play from "Off In A Silent Way... Shhh Peaceful."

The sun is setting spreading dried rose petals for the poets of today as ice-cold clouds ease a touch of old sorrow while sunlight bleeds the sky daisy yellow as our mandarin orange falls the other side of its peel rises above the horizon while the day's last rays cascade and glisten on shimmering leaves shaken from a soft breeze whispering secrets through talkative trees as dandelion seeds carry to the stirring sea to rest on sand particles before sweeping into eternity... shhh! peaceful now.

Part Two

•••

Emancipation of the Soul
— for Robin

“The very time I thought I was lost, my dungeon shook and my chains fell off.”

— James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

It shames me to think of how many suns have risen and fallen without making a token gesture of gratitude to those who have helped shake my dungeon. And you Robin are one of those people. It was this time last year when a hurricane of insanity picked me up, held me and violently threw me to the ground. Like a fool I tried to walk when I could barely stand. At the time I associated with a group of people I blindly considered my friends. But when the dust settled from that mighty hurricane, only a few people stayed around to help me find my legs. The people I am talking about are you, Mark, and Mike M.; I am certain each has helped me in very different ways. I am equally certain you have helped me the most.

This past summer an extremely unique opportunity presented itself to me. I use the word “opportunity” loosely here. Robert Frost wrote, “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I — I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.”

I hope you recall the time when we went to Buckhead’s to eat and I called you a bitch. I laugh now at the stupidity of that moment, which was entirely my fault. More importantly I shared a great sorrow of being molested by a neighbor.

This man called my father at his office this past summer. My Dad’s secretary took a message and he came home to tell me about this intrusion into our lives. A new road was beckoning me, but standing in my way was an old haunt. My options were to nervously stand by and wait for him to call again or call him back.

This was not the first time he had called my Dad since the knowledge of his actions caged my soul. Years have passed since I was sixteen. In those days the chains of fear were wrapped tightly around my neck. Once I was timid; fear had placed me in spiritual bondage.

I started to rationalize reasons for not calling, but realized that God was giving me my chance for redemption. Redemption in some context implies blame, but it also means an end, which is the meaning I prefer to convey. So I decided to call this man who introduced fear, rage and violence into my life many years ago.

The number of reasons for calling were great. However the primary reason for calling was my father's demeanor. I know that both my parents felt an irrational guilt over what had happened to me as a child that had eaten away at them just as fear had eroded my perception of self. There were other reasons for calling, but the urgency I heard in my father's voice when he asked me what I was going to do was reason enough.

I vowed not to fling accusations before I called which would be denied and lead to circular argument. All I wanted to do was make sure this man would never call on my family again. I was terrified and would either be freed or mercilessly crushed depending on what transpired.

My father sat down beside me on our deck outside to listen to the conversation. When I dialed the number, I focused my mind, ready to play a chess match that would determine so much.

"Is Herb there?" I asked.

"Yes, hold on. May I ask who's calling?"

"This is Eric Cecil." My voice was calm, like I wanted it to be. I did not want my emotions to betray me.

"Hello, this is Herb."

"Hi, Herb. This is Eric Cecil, it has —"

"Oh hi, Eric. How have you been?"

The nerve he had to inquire about my well-being shocked me, waking a dull sleeping rage.

"I'm fine," I said calmly, "But you and I need to talk. I am speaking on behalf of my father as well as myself. We do not want to have anything to do with you. You are not to contact us again. We don't want you to write or call."

His reply was as cool as a late October day. "I was trying to call Dave Cecil today, an old neighbor of mine."

Listen motherfucker you know exactly who I am, and if you don't acknowledge me right now, I'm jumping through this phone to rip your fucking head off.

I said, "This is his son, Eric."

"Oh." He sounded like a doctor had told him that he had cancer. "You all don't want anything to do with us." He referred to himself and his wife.

"That's right."

"Okay."

Silence: I hung up. The call had taken less than a minute.

You may be wondering why I was troubled for so many years. I was afraid I was wrong about being molested. Time had caused self-doubt. I still don't know exactly what happened. I knew something had happened and that that was all that mattered. When told not to call or contact my family, he said okay rather than ask why. He knew why, and he knew I knew why.

I needed that okay. It confirmed what I knew. I once believed that the truth I sought would come only through death, through reconciliation with the spirit of my great-grandmother. My parents dropped me at Herb's house because my great-grandmother had journeyed on to the world after this one. She died that day, my sixth birthday, April 30, 1983, imprinting the day onto my being, her final gift that of remembrance.

I found myself walking a new road the morning after my conversation. This road has always been there, but fear and doubt had formed an impossible roadblock to get past. The only reason I am now traveling is through the power of love. My heart breaks when I think of the love you have always given me, but when we first met I was not ready to give back. I could go into the times when I should have returned your love. It pains me to think of those instances. But I do remember.

Greek thinkers pondered the meaning of Love, and they came up with three different kinds: Eros, Philia, and Agape. Eros is the physical attraction between two people. I was filled with Eros based on the way you looked when we first met and upon your moxie. You have a humor that few women have been blessed with. This blend still leaves me at times at a loss for words. I am amazed by you.

I was chained with fear and doubt which crippled my love based on Eros. However, time transformed the fleeting love of Eros into the love of Philia which now allows me to honestly express to you these feelings that have become another cross to bear. I have placed this cross on my back because I have not had the courage to tell you how I feel. As I write a feeling of liberation has come over me.

Philia is an open, lasting love. It is the love of brothers and sisters, of husbands and wives. It is based on honesty and trust. Philia is the love you showered upon me in my time of need. I have taken more love from you than I can repay. You might not believe this, but I do. There were days last fall when depression threatened my existence. A great deal of the love that helped sustain me during that time came from you. You provided the warmth and light that eventually led me to a new kind of love.

This new love is what the Greeks call Agape. Agape is a love that gives without thought of reward. It is a love God bestows upon men and women so they may overcome great difficulties and endure staggering losses. God gives this love, but there is always choice. And with this choice one road divides into two. One of these roads is paved with bitterness, fear and hatred. Materialism, power and avarice light the desolate night. There is never peace or silence: cries, screams and the sound of unspeakable horror pierce the stagnant air. At the end of this road is heartache, sorrow and emptiness. Dishearteningly, there are many people eager to start upon it.

I have started down the path that is less traveled. And Robin, you should never underestimate that your love helped place me on this road. You are very treasured.

I questioned God for so long instead of accepting. I denied and by denying, I now know my soul would never have the freedom to bask in the sunlight of love that shines down upon all of us. I now understand that love is not a stagnant pool of water, but a mighty river that shapes and creates what it touches.

You may be wondering why I choose to express my love and gratitude to you. I have selfish reasons of course. One is that I know the expression of these thoughts and feelings are overdue. I also know that time has grown precariously short. I will graduate in a year and a phone call to you will likely involve a “1” and an area code. I don’t believe Lexington fits into my future. But the overwhelming reason I write is to tell you I do love you, which I hope you know by now. I hope that if your perception of me changes after reading this, it’s for the better.

Love always,

Eric

•••

A Letter to the University Christians

The carousel of violence spinning out of control in the Middle East has awakened my sleeping conscience. The dated headline that caused my heart to ache and voice to falter read, “Eight-year-old Palestine girl killed, violence erupts.” The article went on to explain that an Israeli had shot her in the head. This is unacceptable.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate can not drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction.... The chain reaction of evil hate begetting hate, war producing more wars — must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation.”

The world in which we live has descended into a mineshaft of desolation. The light we need to guide us back to humanity has long been extinguished — or has it? Principles of love, freedom and brotherhood have choked and drowned in the quicksand of hatred, conformity and selfishness. Have they not? The idealistic, utopian dreamer will see the hope in despair. But I must interject that if humanity were a man, he would be lying on a deathbed of hatred, a blanket of isolation would be covering him and the stagnant air of bitterness would be suffocating him. Consider the headline: “Eight-year-old Palestinian girl killed, violence erupts.”

If the human race has a collective soul it is surely burning in hell when we allow a murdered child to become a political pawn by labeling her as Palestinian. Most of us cannot imagine being eight years old again. The sunlight of our childhood changed into the midnight of our adulthood too long ago to recall what the yearnings of an eight-year-old child are. The mother of that child will never forget the sound of her daughter’s laughter. Innocent laughter will rob her sleep, haunt her dreams and mutilate her soul. Her tears of sorrow will turn to tears of bitterness and into blinding hatred, which will consume her every breath.

The house that little girl blessed is now cursed. Imagine her father, alone, sitting in her room, trying to find some comfort and sanity. He silently weeps as he looks at a photograph of his daughter; the knowledge that she will never grow older mocks him. He will never hear his daughter call him daddy again. She will never be kissed under the moonlight. She will never be courted and married. His daughter will never bless him with grandchildren. His pain is great and his retribution will be greater. As the rocks on his daughter’s grave crumble under the strain of the elements, the hatred in his heart will solidify.

I must first strengthen and bend my backside for that judgment. My sin lies in my inaction. My transgression originates from my silence. I have spent thousands of dollars toward my college education, yet when asked for nickels and dimes by the homeless I find my pockets empty. Why bother with an education when I continually ignore the plight of children and adults of which ignorance has given birth? How many times have I labeled people because of their political and religious beliefs? Yes, my guilt is great; my atonement must be greater. Luckily, I have learned to forgive myself for my shortcomings.

Humanity must forgive before it can move to a bed of love. The thin tattered blanket of isolation must be removed; a woven quilt stitched with tolerance and understanding will be protection enough from the howling winds of retribution. The air of bitterness must be purified. We can no longer afford to allow the stench of gunpowder to offend Humanity's delicate nose.

We must first find the common ground where we can plant the tree that will provide the wood before we build the bed. Then brave people who will dirty their hands with earth must step forward. The planters will grow old and tired, so we will need our children to nurture the tree into adulthood. Then compassionate souls must cut down the tree and fasten it into a bed.

When we build the bed for Humanity, we can start the process of sewing a quilt for it also. Humanity will begin to mend with a good bed and a warm quilt. More generations will pass before Humanity will have the strength to walk out of that room saturated with the smell of gunpowder.

I'm not foolish. Planting trees and sewing quilts is dangerous business. One man, born in Kentucky and raised in Illinois, was killed for planting such a tree. President Lincoln once wrote, "With malice toward none; with charity for all: with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work that we are in; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves and with all nations." Six weeks later President Lincoln's blood was spilled at Ford's Theater in Washington D.C.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountain top. And I don't mind. Like anybody I would like to live a long life — longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will." Less than twenty-four hours later he was shot at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. Dr. King's attempt to sew a blanket of understanding and tolerance for Humanity came to a bloody end.

President Kennedy once wrote, “For this is a time for courage and a time for challenge. Neither conformity nor complacency will do. Neither the fanatics nor the faint-hearted are needed.” President Kennedy never spoke that, he was assassinated before he breathed life into those words.

True, planting trees and sewing quilts is dangerous business, but it is far more dangerous to patiently wait for violence to molest us. There is a carousel of hatred slowly spinning right here in Lexington, Kentucky.

The theme of a recent campus publication by the University Christian Fellowship was evolution vs. creationism. I was glad that someone was taking advantage of their First Amendment rights. What gave me pause, however, was three short paragraphs in an article entitled “Tailgate Philosophy.” The article was about bumper stickers and what certain bumper stickers meant to the writer of the article. For the bumper sticker that reads Visualize World Peace the writer wrote, “Jesus Christ is the true head over all the universe. World peace will come when every person who has ever lived bows before His authority and declares together Jesus Christ is the boss. All those who hate peace (those who do not follow Jesus) will then be removed from the picture and true peace will reign forever. Ah yes, I can see it now!”

For the bumper sticker, Hate Is Not A Family Value, the writer wrote, “This is a great sticker because it seems to pack such a wallop. Right-wingers who claim to hold to family values ‘hate’ everyone who doesn’t agree with them, right?”

“Actually, hate isn’t a family value per sé, but it is an important facet of justice. In the biblical sense, hate doesn’t mean ‘I think you are icky,’ but ‘I will not allow you to ruin the peace (see above) and happiness of others.’ Society ‘hates’ criminals when it punishes them. God hates those who violate his laws and thus harm others. So according to God, hate, while not a family value, is something that God values as necessary for protecting his family.”

I want to express my admiration for the writer’s honesty about his feelings concerning world peace, God, justice and hatred. I responded only because I saw children handing out the newspaper. Adults know better, or should. But for children, The University Christian is an undated permission slip for violence with the forged signature of Jesus Christ on it.

The only line I wish to address is: “Actually, hate isn’t a family value per sé, but it is an important facet of justice.” Men who believed this scar the twentieth century, as well as the history of the world. The integration of hate and justice caused a group of men to fashion themselves in white hoods and white bed sheets so they could set aflame a fiery cross at the top of Stone Mountain, Georgia in

1915. The cross could be seen for miles around. When hatred and justice becomes intertwined men like Adolph Hitler ascend to power and words like Holocaust are born. When hatred pollutes justice, men such as Timothy McVeigh blow up children, women, men and oh yes even buildings. When hatred desecrates justice, nameless, daughterless fathers pick up weapons of destruction and shatter the hopes and dreams of nameless fathers and mothers. This must stop.

The purpose of justice is not to procreate hate, but to cleanse the soul of hate and ready the soul for compassion. It is true in our society that hate and justice have become intermingled. But it is also true that the moonlight of every night illuminates the results of this perverted justice. Needless to say, I find it deplorable that so-called Christians teach their children that hatred is an important facet of justice.

Humanity is sick; a lonely death will ensue if mankind continues to tolerate the malignant growth of hatred. Individual salvation lies with God, but Humanity's fate rests in the hearts and minds of those who pray to God.

...

Reflections on the Morning of September 11, 2001

Oh my God
Oh my God
Oh my God
Oh Jesus
Oh Jesus
Where are my clothes?
Oh my God
Oh Jesus
Oh my God
Where are my clothes?

•••

A New World: September 12, 2001

There is life in death. To die is to linger with the dawn and retire for a cool swim in soft moonlight without fear of being pulled down by mortality. Death condenses with the snowy clouds only to fall, healing, softening the unforgiving ground. It is with great sorrow and deepest sympathy that I write this.

The hate-filled actions of the nameless have brought great terror to the people of the United States. In New York, there are men, women, fathers, mothers, children, husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, grandfathers, grandmothers, aunts, uncles and cousins lost in sorrow, grief and insanity. Our prayers belong to families affected by the terrorist attack that darkened the skies September 11, 2001.

Now many unfortunate families gather around the bedsides of their — now our — loved ones. Many will perish, some will survive; I will not comment on which one I consider to be the luckier. I will comment on how the surviving will pull through.

Love will nurse back to life those burned and disfigured. Tonight, the wounds of the bleeding are bound with love and compassion not necessarily by their fellow Americans, but by their fellow man. Those who mourn will be wrapped in the arms of our brothers and sisters, arms that will radiate love. If I could have one prayer granted by God it would be that the deepest comfort and understanding concerning the loss of life find its way into the hearts of those who need it.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “When evil men plot, good men must plan. When evil men burn and bomb, good men must build and bind. When evil men shout ugly words of hatred, good men must commit themselves to the glories of love.”

Evil men plotted, burned and murdered. By their actions our elected leaders have come to a crossroads. Soon they will lead not only Americans, but humanity and unborn generations down a new path. This road we have been traveling upon was not paved on September 11th; it began as a dirt trail on July 4th, 1776. But a new course will soon be set that will last into countless tomorrows. The path that calls America frightens me.

In the days ahead, young men will leave tearful wives and confused children, consoling themselves with self-images of bravery. The judgment of bravery is bestowed upon by God. The most courageous act a man or a woman can do is raise loving children. This is before mankind and is as sacred as the holiest of books.

But men will forgo raising their children so that the country where their children live can be safe from an enemy that is not human per sé. In fact, the enemy men will fight is hatred. I am not writing to judge the mettle of those who will unquestionably go to fight this unknown enemy. I am questioning the consequences of the battles that will soon take place.

The United States has the impossible task of preventing terrorism because the terrorism that darkened our skies was most likely born in an area of the world which all but a few are ignorant. In my lifetime one war has already been fought in the Persian Gulf. We have come full-circle from that war, and as Americans we have learned very little about our Middle Eastern brothers and sisters. To call them anything else is to denounce God. Spirituality teaches that men and women of all colors and beliefs are children of God, yet we know very little about one another.

Today we live in a world where globalization has meaning only in commerce and war. Yet globalization could mean much more. The theory of unselfish unity, if unleashed on poverty, disease and ignorance, could create a new world for an ancient sun to set on. But we are being led down a path paved with hatred and fear, lined with fatigued orphans clothed in rags. At the end of this path is ongoing war and destruction.

It is obvious to me that war on terrorism will prove futile; all wars are simply recycled unresolved animosities between self-interested conflicting personalities that dilute the truth to the point where the conflict in question no longer has a real beginning.

President Kennedy wrote, “For our nation is founded on the principle that observance of the law is the eternal safeguard of liberty and defiance of the law is the surest road to tyranny.”

The test facing our nation is not the rebuilding of buildings and the burying of bodies. Those are difficult and heartbreaking challenges, but our true challenge is whether our nation can abide by the principles our forefathers and fallen leaders dedicated their lives preserving.

If we fail to bring those responsible to face the legal system we will be disgracing those who have fallen, and will be walking down the road of tyranny. If we indulge our anger we will not be seeking justice but retribution. Before we seek retribution, we must decide if it is worth risking the safety of future generations? Retribution is not the end, but the beginning of a cycle of violence.

Hope springs eternal, but as a student of history one comes to the inevitable realization that the foreign policies of the United States are often self-serving. Because I have learned this, I was not as shocked as some of my fellow citizens. What has perhaps saddened me most is the impulsive responses I have felt from

many. Some have allowed hatred to creep into their hearts and actions. The exorcism required will not be administered by more fear and hate, but by love.

Throughout these last thirty-six hours I have heard the widespread avocation of violence against the Middle East. I have even heard the avocation of nuclear weapons. I can almost feel violence rolling off people, could sense for example the anger directed at one Middle Eastern woman on campus. Has she become so evil in a day?

The end I believe we share is the dream that mankind will one day be able to rest its bruised and bloody head on a pillow of peace and sanity. In this dream men and women of all colors, speaking in all tongues, all holding hands, will gather around humanity, praying synonymously. God answers in this dream and gives humanity the power to forgive so that we can seek a final chance at collective love.

I know not the hearts of men. I am not certain people want this peace and I feel very alone when I dream of it. I am no longer sure people possess the compassion, tolerance and understanding to court and marry peace.

I believe Americans will eventually turn to violence. Pursuing violence with violence will erect a wall between mankind and salvation, blocking the nourishing sunlight of God. Mankind will live in darkness. This wall's construction did not begin yesterday, but when man learned to speak against his fellow man many nights ago. In the wake of the violence that besieges our nation, we will likely climb that wall armed with fear and hatred. As the wall grows, the chance that children will embrace peace slims to nonexistence.

I will not join those climbers (actually in descent). Any effort to tear down the wall will only further its construction. I will instead love those who are not capable of being loved, with the hope that one day they will set aside their fears and hatreds long enough to carry out the commands of God and to teach their children how to love.

•••

History Talk for the Hawks
— for Doug

I've never read a poem concerning the virtues of war, and will you explain how much of my leftover tax dollars will pay for social security?

I'm a little confused, so will you tell me again, take me through it one more time, about how talons sink and tear, but leave behind peaceful scars and sweet tears?

Tell me again about World War Two, and its rewards: the ruins, rubble and virtual bankruptcy of France; did they re-colonize Vietnam after V-E day, or ask permission first from one of the two emerged superpowers?

I've read only a little bit of this and that on Vietnam, so would you kindly elucidate... when the CIA assassinated our man Diem without Kennedy's knowledge, and when Kennedy himself was assassinated three weeks later — was that the turning point in the jungles or did everything turn on a dime with the Tet Offensive?

Hawks, I'm here. You can circle with pinpoint eyes, you can criticize and I'll listen to understand; but your arguments will get picked apart,
because
truth
and
love
don't wear camouflage.

•••

A Letter from a Previously Unknown Region of My Soul

I have spent too many mornings dreaming of a better tomorrow. But I am finally fully awake and see I no longer have the luxury of those dreams. My bloodshot eyes uneasily rest on the broken glass idealistic dreams of tomorrow that lay glistening in the unrelenting searing sunlight of today. I am chilled as the blanket of procrastination has been pulled off, as tomorrow was faded into today, and as yesterday has jumped into tomorrow. This concept of time is frightening, yet I hear hope call my name. I also cannot ignore the sound of battle trumpets calling weapons of destruction to find their homes in the arms of man.

A war is being waged where an end may never take place. My mind tells me that by pursuing war mankind will ride into the sunset, leaving the campfires of war smoldering, waiting to consume the papers of peace for the unborn to douse again. My mind also tells me that mankind is marching into a desert of destruction, relentlessly chasing a mirage of peace. Yet my soul speaks louder than my mind.

I am comforted by the deeply embedded belief that in a desert pierced by the cries of the suffering, there is an everlasting oasis of charity undiscovered. The belief that heaven cannot be found on earth has been chained to a boulder of fear. Yet history stands by my side, testifying that a great president stood before a nation whose coffers were empty, on the verge of collapse, and said, "So first of all let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself — nameless, unreasoning, unjustifiable terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." So my soul tells me that calloused hands working together can break the shackles of fear. Mankind has searched for an oasis of charity since crawling out of the cave. Yet we are farther today from that collective salvation, thwarted by a demon named Hatred.

I am going to portray hatred as a woman for imagination's sake. Upon first glance, she is a beautiful, stunning woman and many men have fallen for her. She wears a glowing gold sequin dress that orphaned children hand-stitched with bleeding fingers and weeping hearts. She is always in style due to the byproducts of war— hungry, moaning, shaking, fatherless and motherless children. Hatred is selfish; she never gives and usually takes from those with little to give. Hatred wears gold high-heel shoes. However, upon examination of her footwear, one sees blood stains where she stepped on the dreams of poets. Hatred wears gold, silver, diamonds, rubies, emeralds and opals of every shape and size — acquired through conquest and plunder — her trophies.

Hatred's fingernails are painted blood-red to hide the dead skin and the dried blood underneath them. Her full lips are painted to hide the cracks infected by her lies. She never smiles in joy, but in joy robbed. Hatred's eyes never rest, but dart and prowl to convolute the sight of others blinded by her false beauty. Her face has undergone the scalpel countless times in an effort to conceal her true maturity. Unfortunately men still lust after her despite her ancient age. Men do not seek Hatred, but too often cannot escape her outstretched arms. As loving men embrace her, she sticks her tongue into men's ears and turns the sacred into the profane. Hatred promises men power if they do her bidding. She desires men to spread her lies. Hatred is the biggest purveyor of violence; the manifestation of hunger, greed, poverty, illiteracy and irresponsible power.

I have spent too much time on Hatred. She is sick and her coffin is in the process of being built by forgiveness, the beginning of the end of any conflict, a lesson a dear friend recently re-taught me. There is no greater gift than forgiveness, no greater reward than redemption, the eventual end of a long journey toward the refreshing waters of lasting peace. As the journey begins with a single footstep, we must not forget mankind's magnificent eternal guide, Love.

Love is creation. Love is trust. Love is honesty. Love is respect. Love is hope. Love is faith. Love is tolerance. Love is forgiveness. Love is humility. Love is comfort. Love is humor. Love is discipline. Love binds. Love creates through kindness and gentleness. Love encourages. Love touches and holds. Love fulfills promises. Love always helps the helpless. Love answers all cries, for Love never denies spiritual aid. Love transcends time and death. Love never diminishes. Love is our humanity. Love is the unseen undercurrent of the river of life. Love toils constantly under our darkest midnight like ocean waves. Love never grows tired. Love never goes bankrupt. Love has no price but is priceless. Love lives in the heart and is seen through the action. Love has caused me to search my soul, to face some hard truths.

I heard a comment by someone walking through campus concerning whether gas prices were going up the day after the terrorist attacks. This attitude is the very disease leaving our nation spiritually sick. Materialism caused the United States not to intervene in Afghanistan because that country had nothing to offer to the United States.

When people whose opinions I value read this, they will believe I'm confused, unaware that a war is being waged so I may freely express myself. My prayers are in fact with those men and women who risk their lives today and my hope is for their return to their loved ones as soon as possible.

But I will assert my belief again. The United States decided not to intervene in Afghanistan, because that country had no economic base and no accessible natural resources.

I have recently read a 17-page special report that was filed by the United States Institute on Peace. Congress sponsors this institute. I will not go into the details of the report, since many already know some of the policies of the Taliban government. The special report was discussed on October 1, 1998 in a briefing attended by approximately eighty policy analysts, media representatives and academics. The report concluded that the time to face the challenge of the Taliban government is now.

I feel a great deal of mental anguish and disappointment over my government's decision not to effectively face the challenges of the Taliban government three years ago. The United States is approaching a spiritual death. I believe this statement is true when my government disregards a report that speaks of starving children, that tells of a country run by money from the lucrative opium trade, that indicates that women have been stripped of their rights, that tells of a totalitarian government threatening the peace of those countries struggling to maintain peace in a hostile part of the world, a report that spells out the threat of terrorism to the United States.

But I cannot place sole responsibility on my country's democratic government. Thomas Jefferson wrote, "Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." I conclude that the collective will of the people decreed that the cries from Afghanistan should fall on deaf ears.

Mankind is walking into a cold winter that will freeze the progress of humanity. I fear that the ears of the people have grown deaf to the possibility of a more peaceful world. My soul tells me that a world where Love is given without fear of rejection, where the gift of giving is the gift itself, is possible.

There has never been a greater need for change in the history of the world than now. Humanity cannot afford another war when we live in the nuclear age. So as the visions of our leaders derive their sight from the eyes of the people, our nation must remember the words of a delicate Indian man named Mohandas Gandhi, "We must be the change we wish to see."

•••

Sellout

I could come off it a little bit,
which always becomes a little more,
and since this is about money —
doesn't that sound ridiculous?
I should seriously just give in and stop
writing about peace
and scrape together some dollars
and buy a pair of soft expensive shoes —
you know the kind you put
a penny in and wear without socks,
which is about a million and three miles from cool
and three wrong turns from hip.
But really I could just forget everything
I've learned and read by M.L. King
so I could make statements like
"I think war is wrong, but."
And that "but" just kills me because it's either violence or it's not
and I guess what I'm trying to say is that I know I could...
and a reminder to those aspiring,
you have to actually buy into something
or you have to actually believe in someone before you...
so I have the criteria and if I put my mind into it
and take my heart and soul out of it
I'm capable and stranger things have happened
maybe one day I could join the Republicans or the Democrats
and vote the party line and....
I need to learn how to... my First Amendment rights
and blunt my words because they
might come with a sting and cause
someone some discomfort and I have a feeling
they're going to get me labeled as a radical
oh well.

•••

Say What?
—for Malcolm X

I just don't care anymore. I don't care about the broken road of retribution certain people still think on; it will stretch only so far, and isn't reconciliation the goal? I don't care for the icy cold status quo consensus society resurrected by the baby-boomer generation nor do I care for the parade of ticker-tape violence streaming below the consciousness of pundit journalists and I honestly cannot recall what the American Dream is anymore, but I still believe in dreams.

I did not believe in war before I saw its fear and horror so why should I believe in war now? Does that make me a conscientious objector? And is it so awful to be concerned about organized violence? Which brings up the question should I remain silent and tongue tied to voicelessly sign a permission slip for bloodshed? But why would I do that when I believe in the power of love? Is that so wrong?

•••

In Memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
(January 15, 1929 - April 4, 1968)

*— for the King family, A. Phillip Randolph, Anne and Carl Braden,
Nikki Giovanni and for Mrs. Rosa and the Freedom Riders*

I come to speak about the unhealthy conditions mankind faces today. Since the beginning of the war in Afghanistan there has been little compassionate discussion about the innocent children who have languished under bombs of destruction, while eating from plates of emptiness and drinking from cups of helplessness. I have watched horrified as many Americans have passed unconditional love to the souls of their children, then, suffering from an ambiguous disease, have rolled collateral damage off their tongues with such unbecoming familiar ease.

Mankind is very young when compared to the love between the gravity stricken rain and the parched earth. When viewed in this light, mankind is an infant and must be taken to the Doctor when it is obvious there is a malady that thwarts our humanity. I don't have to look far to see the symptoms of an illness that, if left untreated, will leave mankind in a marked grave with a dilapidated headstone that reads "Hatred."

In the Appalachian Mountains people live in third-world hills. Adequate health care and education are cruel mirages that have disappeared like forgotten sunsets. The tentacles of despair are suffocating men and women from the breezy air of hope and economic betterment. In economically segregated inner cities throughout the country, embers of frustrations fueled by police brutality have left cities like Los Angeles and Cincinnati engulfed in the flames of racial riots.

Of course, the people of the United States make up a small fraction of our world. The economic prosperity of the United States is not indicative of the health of Africa, East Asia and the Middle East. The illnesses those huge regional populations face indicate that mankind is approaching a spiritual and physical death on a broken bed of love surrounded by fear-driven retaliation and hatred.

In Africa, the soil is not yielding needed nourishment but shallow graves. The pandemic AIDS is burying a generation. The young and the elderly cling to one another, barely keeping their heads above a staggering sea of misery. The inferno of AIDS is steadily spreading, consuming Africa. We must begin to ask the difficult question of who will raise the orphans and who will care for the elderly?

In China, men and women long for the precious sunlight of liberty. I will never forget watching the rumbling tanks in 1989, and the political dissenter who stood in the motorized shadow of death. Our foreign policy makers have rewarded his courageous stand by trade agreements. On the fast highway of profits, our nation's history has been disregarded like a hitchhiker in the howling winds of avarice. We have forgotten that when the United States broke the manacles of monarchy from the British throne, we did so with the help of the French.

The profanity of the Middle East is appalling. Three monotheistic religions based on love and brotherhood have dishonored their sacred prophets by taking up weapons of destruction. Their followers indicate that ethnicities and nationalities will segregate in the afterlife. Men pray to the same spiritual entity for each others' destruction, believing their prayers just and righteous.

These illnesses that mankind faces today are symptomatic of a deeper malady that can no longer be ignored. I am deeply troubled that globally men give little thought or regard to those souls that tarry through mournful melodies of war, dressed in black at the graves of husbands and children.

If women are fortunate, they are subjected to only economic injustices. But with regularity, women find themselves shackled to a tree of inequality, stripped and raped of their inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The day has passed when women should have to prove they can think. I am convinced that women will provide the key to unlock men from the dungeons of organized violence.

At a time when silence is not a solution, some believe that now is not the time to talk about peace. Some believe that God will bless the marriage of mankind and peace through a courtship of warfare. There are some who believe that we must wait for peace, as if peace can be packaged and placed under a Christmas tree by Santa Claus. Those that believe this have forgotten that the rise and fall of the sun and moon lack even the slightest regard for the trappings of mankind. If we wait for peace much longer, we will never live in a world that is not saturated by the stench of gunpowder and the sound of crying children.

Out of the unimaginable human tragedy that began in the morning hours of September 11th, a beautiful lesson must be learned. I hope mankind will remember that we all live under the same sun, all dream under the same moon and all draw life from the same waters. When we come to the realization that the destiny of one man is eternally intertwined with that of his poor lost brother, then the strayed clouds of compassion will shower upon our world an understanding that will wash away our inhumanities.

I still possess the audacity to believe that hope will not drown in the quicksand of despair. I still believe that from a mineshaft of suffering, the guiding light from the heavens above will lead mankind to a fertile plateau of peace and harmony. I still believe that even from smoldering ashes on earth, that love will ascend to the throne of the moral universe and peace will reign.

Therefore, allow me to come to you, humbled within our guiding light, to remember the words of Edgar Allen Poe: “Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing, doubting dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before.”

I dream of the day the pacified youth of the nation will walk out of confining rooms of conformity and complacency and into the warm sunlight of social activism.

I dream of justice tempered with love, so that men will no longer be dragged down debilitating corridors of destruction, but will instead reside in the creative glow of redemption.

I dream of open-minded men who will accept the wisdom of women and begin down the path less traveled to the accommodating table of goodwill.

I dream of Afghanistan one day transformed into an everlasting oasis of freedom and love.

I dream the frayed fabrics of freedom will be sewn together by Americans and Afghans and Israelis and Palestinians.

I dream of the day when the words “nuclear annihilation” cease to cast fear in the hearts of world citizens.

I dream of a time when men empty their guns and fill their hearts and minds with the understanding that we are all brothers and sisters, displaced only by time, geography and genetics.

I still believe that men and women everywhere will watch the tired white dove of peace gracefully sail the oceans and restfully perch upon the trees of the seven continents!

These glimmering dreams will clear the overcast night of war into the soothing day of peace. Drawing on these dreams, historians will be able to pick up their pens to begin writing a lasting chapter on peace and brotherhood. Never despair; a weary sun will set on ancient hatreds. In the words of Abraham Lincoln's most famous decree, all men and all women will finally be forever free. And on the day when the promises of the prophets become the realities of today, the broken-winged angels will sing.

So let them sing from the foothills of the Appalachians to the heavenly heights of the Himalayas. Let their melodies sound the weathered bells of the steepest Christian cathedrals and carry to the exquisite Muslim mosques and to the sacred Jewish temples. Let their music travel from the lush jungles of South America to the deserts of Afghanistan, from the Arctic to the South Pole, from the breadbasket of America to the rice paddies of East Asia and the Fertile Crescent of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

Yes, let us live in peace from the daybreak of dawn to the unexplored atmosphere of eternity!

When peace is believed in, when it is heard, when it is felt, when it is written in the history books of tomorrow and lived under the darkest corner of the globe, when it is the guiding principle within the souls of Jews, Hindus, Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists, we will join hands and sing new meaning into the words of the African American spiritual — Free at Last, Free at Last, Thank God Almighty We're Free at Last!

•••

Broken Dreams

All it is,
is a blank page
and we take and try
to feel inspired
or feel anything worthwhile
in this world we all cherish
yet can't wait to destroy,
and I don't know what it will take
but it's our destiny
and with love as our means
peace is a certainty,
but, in this night of broken dreams
when brothers bleed,
we're too blind to see
God must surely weep
unable to look away
as some men go hungry or to jail
or jobless because some still
can't get past the color of the vehicle
to see the personality,
the love, the hopes,
the aspirations,
the humanity,
at the wheel.

•••

Despair Frustration Resignation

I'm tired.
I'm through.
I've reached bottom.
I hate writing about war.
I'd rather write about the wisps
behind a woman's ear when she wears
her hair pulled back.
I'd rather think about her neck
and her pulse waiting there.
I'd almost rather write about geometry.
I'd rather write French papers.
It's you youth,
Me me me me.
It's you youth,
Mr. and Ms. MTV.
It's you youth,
sitting silently stoned,
presently pathetically pacified
mindlessly listening to the
monotone drone
of an oxymoronic reality TV show.
It's you youth, you're not part of any solution.
You're part of the fucking problem and I quit.

•••

Shy Moon
— for Charlotte

I've been lonely,
I might be lonely now.
I've been lonely,
I might be lonely now.
I've been lonely,
I might be lonely now.
I've been alone,
I might be alone now.
I've been alone,
I might be alone now.
I've been alone,
I might be alone now.
I've been alone,
I might be alone now.
Sometimes I've been lost in the woods.
I've been lost under a shy moon,
I might be lost now.
Sometimes I've been lost in the woods.
I've been lost under a shy moon,
I might be lost now.
Sometimes I've been lost in the woods.
I've been lost under a shy moon,
I might be lost now.
But when I'm lost in the woods
under a shy moon,
I'm really trying to find home.
I'll find home.
Under a shy moon?
I'll find home.
Under a shy moon?
I'll find home, under a shy moon,
because when there is any light
there will never be complete darkness.

...

Conscience Alone

Conscience begs forgiveness and Love answers before Conscience asks. Conscience blindfolds skin color and gender. Conscience wears neither patriotism nor shouts nationalism. Conscience stands behind justice, writing laws governing all. Conscience fails to differentiate between ethnicities and competing religious ideologies. Conscience drives reunion down the road of Love and righteousness toward wrong.

My conscience is the basis for my objections concerning the war on terrorism because my conscience tells me that violence, “V,” causes a problem:

$$V + V = 2V = 2V(t),$$

“t” = time. The solution for that problem is XLC... “X” representing the constant unknown, “L” representing Love a constant, “C” representing Conscience, a variable. Currently, internationally, the problem looks like this:

$$V(T) + V(US) = 2V(T)(US) = 2V(T)(US)(t).$$

“T” represents Terrorism; “US” represents the United States.

Right now there’s strong talk to adding another “V” to a problem mathematicians already can’t solve, erasing conscience alone into this:

$$V(T) + V(US) + V(I) = 3V(T)(US)(I)prco = 3V(T)(US)(I)prco(t)...$$

“I” represents Iraq; “prco” variables represent politics, regime change, and oil.

That’s rocket science even Albert Einstein wouldn’t touch, so right now my conscience has to talk....

“p” changes into an unknown = International foreign policy laws.

Politics clouds the original wrong. History is viewed at least fifty to one hundred years back and historical visions are viewed fifty to one hundred years forward;

dates aren't important. Lesson on anti-American hate. First regime change in Iran. The Shah comes to power... extremely abusive. Pro-Western pro-oil pipelines sprout, but revolution... the Ayatollah Khomeini comes to power riding pro-Western pro-oil hatred. War breaks out between Iran and Iraq and those weapons of mass destruction originally came from politics. Politics speaks to the majority... politics are corruptible. Is this what we're fighting for? Remember our Prophets. Remember Abraham. Remember David. Remember Jesus. Remember Muhammad. Remember Arjuna. Remember Siddhartha Gautama. Remember Confucius. Remember Slavery. Remember Egypt. Remember Moses...the Promised Land. Remember South America. Remember Africa. Remember America. Remember Slavery. Remember Douglass. Remember Lincoln. Remember Colonialism. Remember India. Remember Gandhi. Remember Segregation. Remember South Africa. Remember Mandela. Remember Tutu. Remember King: "It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world. It's nonviolence or nonexistence; that is where we are today."

America... the post-World War II generation objected to Vietnam based on political beliefs, politics change. The politics of that generation accomplished nothing concerning legally injecting conscience into governing foreign policy which cares about, among other things, international profits.

I inquire about writing a formal amendment to the Charter of the United Nations consisting of business law, international law, constitutional and domestic law governing and allotting a percentage of international oil profits to the environment, to shelter, to food relief, to the education of citizens around the world. Between .9 tenths of a penny or 1.9 tenths of a penny or three cents a gallon. Between .9 tenths of a penny or 9.9 tenths of penny or a dime per barrel. Is this what we're fighting for, less than pocket change? What have we forgotten that the collective Conscience of Humanity cannot remember...

o = H = H₂O

Oil is a fossil fuel... oil is money and power... oil is not money... oil is not power... oil is money and power... The byproducts of hydrogen engines is water... variable o has a lease on politics governing foreign policy.

rc = reason

Regime change would entail U.S. responsibility to establish a democracy in a region where a large minority (or slight majority) of the population is unable to read and would be unable to understand its rights. If Rousseau believed the first inequality of man arose from the rate men evolved muscle and instinct to intellect and reason, then the first inequality for modern woman is the denial to the ability to read, and if you can't read, you're a slave to another mind. You can be told anything. If you can't read, a sentence looks like this:

EFEVRAI...nwdahsallisreinotawneronizohrednuhchiwenmndawne
moweepthiwtourrowsoraestfleecitvreinhteeesyfollatehnusthiglillw
eboiprveddybhteraizlatnoifoLOVE.

If you can't read, you would never know that sentence means this:

If ever a dawn shall rise into a new horizon under which men and women weep without sorrow, tears reflective in the eyes of all, the sunlight will be provided by the realization of LOVE.

...

The Word of God

Tu parle francais?

Non? Oui?

Pour Conscience Alone

le mot est VRAI, et il moyens

en anglais : true real genuine right proper
fit downright truly really in truth; truth

In the Beginning,
there was truth and
those four semesters
and two dropped French
classes really did pay off
and I think that's absolutely hilarious,

I really do.

In the End,

Love is Amour

and I think that's beautiful.

•••

Conformity

— for $V + V = 2V = 2V(t)$

I just have to say
what the hell,
I might as well
work on complicated algebra
and
have a sense of humor
and
have a bumper sticker... everyone else has one.

•••

War!

unleashed
a rabid beast...
after man can no longer
find any words and have
tortured peace three-quarters to death
this is War!
on the docks
sailors are
pulling away
in the midst
of a long slow breeze her shades of auburn
circus in the air as she fingers her wedding ring
she sighs and breathes — till death do we part —
as the sun catches her glistening eyes
she waves goodbye and squeezes the palm
of her sailor's child
barely speaking age asking
why does daddy go away?
this is War!

a machine gun thrust in the hands of a young man
still clean-cut from prom and on the battlefield
a bullet rips open his cranium exposing his brain to the dust
death falls back on lifeless legs
mouth gurgles blood through broken teeth
and an ocean away
a father awakens in sweat and tosses
unable to sleep
this is War!

an explosion shaking the earth like an earthquake
deafening and sparring the lucky
limbs shred away
unidentifiable
this is War!

eerie silence
interrupted by the sound of
flies and boots crunching glass
leading soldiers through smoldering alleyways
blocked by car ruins and smoking blackened bodies
this is War!

the smell of burned flesh
this is War!

after planes sweep screaming
after hell falls from the sky
covered in dust
with tear-streaked eyes
a child on bended knees
cradling the head of his lifeless mother
this is War!

chaos destruction horror
this is War!

a woman beaten and bloody
her mouth is split and her flesh
has been torn from rape
this is War!

a veteran
in a ward
sitting unshaved
wearing hospital pajamas
lost in a mind of nightmares
this is War!
a mother with vacant eyes
as she walks away draped in mourning from
a grave holding a folded flag
a thumb bleeding from a long stem rose
this is War!
taking what cannot be rebuilt or remade
what War! takes
is lost forever.

...

Questions

How much is gasoline?
And when is the GRE?
How many hours should I take?
When can I register?
Where are my car keys?
Where did I put my wallet?
Where are my shoes?
What's the date today?
And how's my mood?

Part Three

•••

Justice For The Mentally Ill
— for Dr. Doreen M.

Front page or maybe
Section "C" Metro page three,
half-a-page down,
in black and white and I haven't
read the article about the young man
with the manic mind
who took the police
on a drive
speeding through the dead of night
at more than a hundred miles per hour
without any headlights on for more than thirty miles
weaving through a wall of fog and I wasn't there
when he stopped his car three miles
from what would have been a deadly roadblock
and I wasn't standing in the line of fire that was never shot
before he was dragged from his car,
thrown down to the pavement with a knee in the back,
handcuffed, put in the back of a Lincoln cruiser
and taken to jail where he spent thirty-six hours having horrific visions of hell
of indescribable horror, pale bloated bodies and black running blood and torture,
but I have heard that on his ride of insanity
and at the doorway to death and past the gates of perdition
that he was protected
by the angels
of God.

I wasn't there months later, sitting in a pew,
among the accused, some dressed in orange-and-white horizontal striped
jumpsuits, wearing handcuffs and leg shackles that
occasionally rattled
unheard in the court room,
under the talk of the prosecutors,
paid lawyers, the public defender

and the occasional state trooper
gathered around one cluttered table
shuffling each others' papers,
smiling, laughing and shaking hands
until the judge walked in
wearing his usual black robe,
to sit in his usual black chair.

I have no way of knowing this because
I wasn't there but I heard that by noon,
the judge fell asleep.

Not hearing four words of the preliminary hearing
with years of experience as if cued from a dream
awaking from his judicial slumber
his right hand caressing his gavel,
the judge agreed to advance
the case to the circuit court.

That young man, out on bond,
feeling alive and at the same time
as if he has been dragged behind
a mule from his crap shoot with death
somehow laughs a little, manages a smile
and says, "Ms. Blind and Wise,
draped in white,
I'm a child of love,
it was my broken mind
not my spirit
that committed my charged crimes."

•••

Hospital Blues
— for Carolyn

In the halls...
doctors, doctors, doctors,
watching them run around
while I'm haunted by the angel of death.
Here comes Charles,
a mason,
charismatic and cackling
wearing two wedding rings,
given a second chance while
he mocks me on television with his crimes.
Manic by my addictions, my demons
and an unrelenting calling.
Now under the hand of the Spiritual Creator,
ever present and forgiving —
Redeeming a world
hung up on violence,
and fear,
a world run by false kings, mad men,
by men consumed with inherited greed.
What will you do for your redemption?
What can you do?
Killing men over killing men,
killing men over killing men.
When will it end?
Wednesday and the ashes are silent,
certain minds are not,
pompous arrogant egos,
wielding mortal talents,
nothing to report in my record,
how I detest them.
There is not a cure, a pill or drug for a lonely soul
that drinks cups of coffee without a loving touch.

•••

Thomas J.

He frightened me,
big, brazen and bleached blond
with aging facial hair.

We were roommates once and he spent some time
in a penitentiary, somewhere in Pennsylvania,
for what he didn't say.
He spoke with a Russian accent
farsighted and without glasses.
Either he or I or both were psychotic for a time,
him dangerously so.

Before leaving out on a pass he showed us
his ski mask and we laughed as we sat smoking
around the ash bowl.
He came back with a burr haircut
shorn down to the stubble
with a pack of papers
and fresh tobacco.

A friendship kindled and I began to look to him for protection.
“You're not going to get out of here doin' that shit man.
Why'd you tear down that sign by the phone?
If you're not careful, they're goin' to put one of us down.
Everything you do in here is watched and written down.”

Used our time in the smoke room to talk about matters
I have little concern about now —
Harold was accused of molesting children.
“Did you know he's a pedophile?”
“Well, if he is, they ought to kill his ass.”

I was deceived once on the inside,
made my temper boil when I found out,
another Russian, an oracle, came to see me —
to tell me to believe.

He was a man of merit; he sat finger tips to finger tips
and nervously moved his knee.
He was injured
in a Serbian war camp.
He was tall and lean;
he came with flowers, an easy smile and a head full of dark hair.
We intensely worked two puzzles missing pieces
and when we found the border, he seemed surprised and satisfied,
“It’s water.”

I told Thomas, “He’s Russian, you know.”
“I know, they were goin’ to put him in my room before you got here.
He wouldn’t keep his part of the room clean.”

He lost some credibility, the oracle, when I heard that
I felt a conspiracy and that ended my Kentucky pleasantries.
Thomas was sent to a mission.

•••

Untitled II

I remember your youthful beauty —
dark brown eyes, dark curly hair
that had been washed with an
African and Indian hand.

Your face, your coffee-cream smooth face,
spotted with adolescence above your brow;
eighteen, barely an adult though you
lied and told me you were twenty-five.

We traded beads once —
my handmade green-triangle white-plastic
and wooden beads strung along an elastic
string for your pink-and-white-speckled
store-bought beads —

I carried yours like spoils before we called it even.

I met you in the dayroom from my sleep,
we nearly traded rings.

My claddagh for your mother of pearl
but —I hesitated in love for another,
in love with the idea.

Ghosts roamed the halls —
I've counted pride, greed and lust — my lust.

I imagine your crime was from
your “inappropriate wants.”

I remember your paranoia.

“They don't want my head, do they?”

“Am I code red?”

We agreed the self-proclaimed “Sir” Charles was far from righteous,
and we admitted to the world that we were not God.

“I'm not God.”

“Well, I'm not God.”

Who put these thoughts in our heads?

•••

The Sea

The sea! the sea! the melancholy sea,
take me over the reaching wounded waves
the dying sprinkling mist,
over the timeless beach,
moving away with the receding tides
melting into the horizon
slow into that inexhaustible dream,
at that hour we must all take,
into an early summer morning,
beaming all over my face.

Hold me in time, swing me with the breath of my ancestors,
that old wind that moves the hope of sails,
let my arms go, landing,
resting into the moonlight,
past the darkness,
through my fading nightmares,
into the light that never wavers,
free! free! once around mighty Orion,
coursing through his body,
shot with his bow through the universe
released, turned whole,
with that piece of given sunlight
that forever glows.

Descending for an ankle-sanded barefoot man,
living between the awaiting heavens of glory
and the sea which has sunk ships of dreams.

He looks to what has washed away his youth.
He strokes his bird-nest beard,
gray as the storms that have dropped him to his knees.

His age carved in his face and around his mouth,
a roadmap of lines around his eyes
that have grown dim,
with years behind him,
tired, breathing, breathing, breathing,
pain, half-bent, hands on his knees,
a white light travels up to the stars,
as he collapses at the edge of tide surf,
before the bittersweet blue that ends,
with his afterlife,
moving across the night.

•••

No Blues: Straight Talk
— for Adam

I know it's hard brother,
I know it's hard.
And sometimes the only choice
doesn't appear the most appealing,
but it's still the only choice.
And I'm not in your shoes,
but I've been in your shoes,
so I know that we've got a chance,
but only by the end of the day,
do we know if our chance has paid.
I know of what hasn't been,
that there are days gone by,
dreams are broken,
but there still is, always will be today,
so believe that today is the day of what will be.
And believe brother, believe that God has never given up on you,
because God never gives up on anyone or anything,
because God never gives up.

I know some don't understand, their footsteps didn't echo down those halls, about
court dates or seclusion rooms and restraints or about locked doors and doors

without locks or about that last phone call and holding and jail cells or about that screaming mental chaos or the hangovers day in and day out and then drinking night after night and then calling it life.

I know about the sting felt from those fair-weather friends,
who really don't care where you've been.
And I know what it's like to walk alone, with a weary soul,
without a breath of life, and I know what it's like to look into
the blackened heart of that unending night,
without ever glimpsing a glimmer of light.
I know how it's been and now there's a storm raging within,
and dangerous waters lay waiting under your shaky bridge,
but that doesn't mean you have to jump back in.
Just hold on,
there are people to turn to
and you're not alone,
you're not alone anymore.
Here's the day that's come,
that your life can be yours again.
Here's the day before you,
a lit guided path for what's been lost.
There's new music for all that chaos.
And there's a place,
there's a home,
to rest your tired soul,
to lay your burdens down,
to ease that troubled mind,
to set those fears aside,
to watch your problems unwind,
there's a place to run to,
so that you don't have to hide.
So look a little forward now and don't dwell behind.
And if you do, if you make that daily renewal,
I promise each day there will be a little more morning sunlight
for that lonely darkness
and you'll find there's twice as much love... for all that pain.

•••

Feeling Blue

today i saw your mother
and
i was doing so well.
today i hugged your mother
and
i
saw
in
her eyes that are yours
in
her face a generation away
in
her mannerisms that move you
i
still
love you.

today i spoke to your mother
and
i
felt underdressed
and
i
felt like i needed a shave
and
i
felt like i needed a peppermint
because
i
still want you.

...

My White Venetian Blinds

Everything has gotten old, the jazz,
the filled bookcase, the lampshades,
the empty face of the TV,
the open envelope bills demanding to be paid on time,
the entertainment center,
the knockoff end tables and the coffee table
stacked with disregarded books, leafed through,
sat down, saturated with dust from the Buddha incense.

Eyes closed, breathe deeply
in one,
in one,
in one,
hold and exhale slowly... repeat.

For peace of mind
I'm in a position to take suggestions
and try anything.

I'm sure I stand crazy-eyed against the world,
to write about a war everyone seems to ignore.
I wonder is this my job? Me?

Can't I just go along with everyone else,
join the crowd at Starbucks?
Make a million dollars and walk among the Beamers
in the sun by the pool of the country club.
Take the easy way out.

I walk to my white Venetian blinds that can either open to the sunlight
or close to the darkness.

It's the same unanswered question from within.
But I believe... It will come.
Whatever It is, It guides.

I listen for that tender inner voice that whispers love against our escalating
brutality of our normality. What we have accepted as rational carves the ground in
graves with massive doses of bloodshed, the taking of human life, our father or
mother or brother or sister —

Will violence clear the sniffling noses, the red eyes, the sorrow
and will it forever close cold caskets and wooden boxes
that are carried down our Middle Eastern streets.
Will violence do this?

I know the answers for my part won't come in a room saturated
with dust, ash and blood-eyed anguish.
I open those blinds and stand next to the opened screen door,
struggling to hold my sanity.
I close my eyes in the sunlight calm.

Autumn wind touches me around the neck
and before I find a dust rag,
It whispers,
Be still.

•••

Winter Daydream

A few unpacked cardboard boxes
stacked in an empty house
with a deep-seated comfortable couch
and a sun flowered rug unrolled on
hardwood floors and a stuttering furnace
in the dead of winter in Old Louisville
with you would be nice.
It would be the day's thrill to unfold
a thick plaid blanket over your smooth bare legs
and to nestle down
into the slow hypnosis and dying rhythm of
a low-crackle fire while the wind howls
as snow dances
against a frosted pane of glass lit by the moonlight.
And eventually, you'll get it all out of me,
—about all the chances,
the untold tears,
the midnight moans,
the fear, the poison I've taken,
the ugliness of good-hearted people,
but right now I want to sit and be still,
— that's over, all is safe,
as I listen to the water pipe whine
as sink-water dribbles while
floorboards wince as the fireplace
goes crackle hiss.

•••

Revelations

He must stand apart from his parents and family
and that's somehow very sad...

He once walked alone up a hot summer hillside
and found God and told God that if He
would meet him halfway he would do the rest.
He thinks about his writing and its struggle,
and remembers he was trying to express
himself to a young woman who somewhere
is now a woman and she was impressed.
He remembers mailing a letter and as
he opened a street corner post office box,
he had a sense his life was going to change.
It did.

He remembers September 11th.
He thinks about the many nights when he was obsessed and
went to bed with a notebook sitting on his dresser
and he would crawl into bed, close his eyes, wait,
get out of bed and write.
He would awake in the morning
still counting syllables before giving up to dream
about adjectives while stirring ideas with coffee.
He didn't sleep well, but he dreamed the old poet's dream —
the world covered over in green clover and raining
vibrant color from the broken end of a mending rainbow.
He thinks about his life's struggle, and it's his parents struggle,
who used to fight behind closed doors.
They had three young children so they held on to what wasn't there
as long as they could, so their children could one day look back
and realize how much they were loved.
He sighs, longs, looks at his calendar and it belongs to Dylan Thomas
and his "In The Beginning,"
"In the beginning was the three-pointed star,
One smile of light across the empty face."

And his calendar belongs to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,
“I know you are asking today how long will it take.
I come to say to you that however difficult the moment,
however frustrating the hour, it will not be long because
Truth crushed to earth will rise again.”
And his calendar belongs to William Stanley Braithwaite and his
“Rhapsody,” “I am glad all day long for the gift of song,
for time and change and sorrow;
For the sunset wings and the world end things
that hang on the edge of tomorrow.”
He thinks about his sister and today he wears her maroon sun-faced shirt.
He might not ever see her again.
She might remain in the rays of the sun,
her birth a gift, her life a teacher.
If they ever meet in the expanse of the universe
the wind will rage and the heavens will open
to the love they knew before they were children.
But she can only call to him from afar
and guide his birth star
and plant the seasons
and move across the fields
and cry in the clouds
and strike the lightning.

He opens a filled notebook with a face of a sun on it.
He flips through the pages, stops, smiles and reads,
“make a promise... relax... get an apartment.... read....
listen to jazz.... listen to your friends... give it to charity.”
He is at peace with himself,
is calm and fulfilled.
He doesn't know where his life is going,
and he doesn't have to know —
his life is in the hands of the Almighty.

•••

The Evening News Blues

Let there be no more
husbands with raised fist
for our battered wives,
no more blues around the eyes,
no more half truths
and no more lies.

Let there be no more fear,
or a need for Homeland Security,
the CIA or the FBI,
and no more flags
burning or otherwise,
and no more conscience-alarming foreign policies,
or screaming shrieking doves,
or charred cars or orphaned children,
baring our unhealed scars,
and no more nuclear waste
or bombs filled with our hate
and let there be no more race,
but the human race...

So let there be no more
hungry gaunt faces,
or polluted water runoff,
or old forest harvesting
or teenage murderers,
no more violence on video games,
or sex or greed on TV,
or status to be bought or sold,
or road-rage or sweat shops in Indochina,
and no more fist-fights under the moonlight
or gang life or drug deals gone bad or missing young men
or drive-bys with bullets flying, bodies falling,
asphalt squealing, parents and children crying.

Let there be Love, and we could start with a safe West Louisville,
and listen to the heartbeat of the poor, the pulse of the mentally ill,
the cries of the medically uninsured, and we could listen to
the teachers, the poets and pay the social workers,
or we could just live equal give-and-take,
so our children will learn
what is mine is ours
so they can sing their own songs
under a new sky with only tears of joy
spilling from their eyes...

There will be an abundance of smiles,
and handshakes and brothers and sisters, families reunited,
new friendships and deep laughter and old jokes
there's bread broken with Grandma's chicken and dumplings,
guitar-playing and singing,
as dreams are kindled while a fire burns as October leaves drift,
as the wind stirs, as toddlers run stumble and fall,
and we can sit around and talk about the old days,
the old-timers can ease aches and pains,
while we play a game of cards for pennies and dimes,
and a new generation can talk about changing this world.

•••

Symptomatic (When Trouble Comes)

— for Dr. Charles F.

My medications changed and the guess-and-tell didn't work well,
but has left me alone, in bed, in a light sleep
and I hear wind chimes all night howling prophesy.
I feel drugged during the day, hung-over on side effects,
with little hope I go through the motions,
with nothing well, I smile, lie and convince you, "I'm fine."

My bloodshot eyes feel shards of glass and specks of sand,
which I hide behind glasses as I suffer symptomatic,
exhausted, drained, yet energized, and I fear hospitalization
and the black water drown of psychosis,
where I can only be beckoned back by soft hands with soft voices,
and by the light of God.

I physically feel the mania waiting to get loose
like a racehorse on race day, kicking at the stall,
wanting to trample through my life.
I feel mania moving, roving in pinpricks beneath my skin
while I vacillate from being moved to tears to being stoic,
angry, cynical and bitter.
For the time being I tell no one but my psychiatrist,
where it's acceptable to be slightly ill.
To publicly speak of my symptoms,
brings shame, humiliation, inferiority,
to be a leper, to be considered a defect while the public asks,
"Bi-polar, isn't that a mental illness?"
Judged and condemned, automatically less-than,
by the slight pitch of unnerve I hear in your voice.

I go to work exhausted, close my office door to drift into a thirty-minute nap,
feel better, and work with love for people crushed by mental illness.
I ride my bike or jog or work out or a combination once home.
I will live my life, not sit still with Kay Redfield Jamison's *An Unquiet Mind*
and Robert Lowell's *Day by Day* sitting on my coffee table.
I read for awhile, then leave for a meeting.
I return, listen to music, burn candles, read and drink sleepy tea.
Chasing sleep really does get old, life gets hard, I get run-down,
and tonight I feel joyless in deadened chunks,
but I survive with Sarah Vaughan singing the blues from the stereo,
by the hope of others, by my experience,
by faith,
by the belief this will pass.

•••

Elizabeth W.'s Blues and Issues #6 & 7

I.

Sometimes it hurts a little, it hurts, it still hurts
and then it hurts just a last little more.

I tell myself it stopped hurting a really long time ago,
and I think about what never happened,
what should have happened,
what I envisioned and wanted to happen,
and I want to cry for the pain
my warped self-will caused:
what I want, what I want and what I want
is what I want
and I really need to scream
at the selfishness, but now there's nothing
but empty silence to scream to.

There are no phone calls, there aren't any dates,
and I can't call you to hear how you're doing,
how life is, how you've been. And I always hope
you're happy.
I can't go back in the past,
and if I could,
I would change the only thing that needed to be changed
which is me
and
I can't
call you now, to tell you that I changed,
that I'm not the same person, that I'm different now
(have you heard this before?)
and I want to call you
and see you
really so you can see my change.

II.

I hear a song, a blues, crying the blues —
singing low, cry brother! cry! cry the blues
about loss, whose fault, what he would do for his baby,
an angel and missing her in his chest, her eyes
and hard times and whiskey stills.
Cry the blues brother! cry the blues with your black hat on
and Sunday's best, wearing dusty well-traveled clothes,
with your harmonica playing slow and guitar picking,
easy on the ear, cry the blues! cry brother, wailing,
waiting at the station in the cold rain
for a train that will take you anywhere.
I still can see her sitting in my car,
driving down the road,
driving without anywhere really to go
with her legs to the floor, in pitch-black,
and she says, "I like that song."

III.

I'm not the fool in love.
I know it's probably better we don't speak
and now that I'm really thinking of you,
the best I could, I gave and did love you
for that period of my life.
I know we're in different places, that you're way over there somewhere,
and my life is going to a different place, in a new direction,
at its own pace and I want to be free from the past,
from you, whom I once loved.
You see, I don't want to look in those eyes
that saw me when I needed help,
when I hurt so bad with skinny shakes,
when I was terrified
not knowing what to do or who to turn to....

And Elizabeth, stars fell in tears, in sobs I thundered and my world ended
in demolition chunks, and I need to remember you walked away.
I need to remember that was what really happened, it's the truth
and now my eyes have a slight discomfort.

I want to forgive, to look better on the circumstances of our parting,
and remember the days, with the sun at your back, the wind in your hair,
and maybe we'll run into each other and maybe not. I'm not hoping.

But I wish, I hope you can forgive me
for the pain of being me and I —
I can be at peace and ease,
with the memories of you.

•••

The Beggar
— for Keith B.

Maybe it will mean something, someday,
this life of hollowed dreams and passion and pain —
I constantly battle the urge to place blame,
to name the opinionated who dressed up truth,
to jump into politics and bitterness —
to exhibit the universal lack of understanding
that grinds unforgivable.
Man is unable to forgive,
to somehow love the unseen brother of our destiny
who stands as a ghost over the seas.
I have one conclusion: This world
isn't for the love of the idealistic,
who dream into the jewel box of glory,
and find themselves destroyed by gun smoke
and by the imaginations of unimaginative men.
The unknown salt-and-peppered-haired beggar on the streets,
an eyesore for the affluent world,
a spokesman for the third-world poor
asks,
“Is it easy
to forget me,
my odor,
my dirty tatters,
my missing teeth.
Just go now and pinch pennies and dimes
with frightened eyes.”
I'm still a little at odds;
some want to hang on to the past
by applying what fails to the future,
while I want to stand in the present
with eyes that are not my own,
and hold my brother who is dying alone.

...

An English Girl

I want to find you tonight and ring your doorbell to bring a single flower, two ripe peaches and one candle of light to your life, to watch you smile as you welcome me in to a set table and politely eat as we slowly talk awhile before we clear away the dishes and I was hoping we could pass our first sunset on your couch listening to Miles Davis do his thing to the blues after we've casually leafed through your bookcase as I listen to your opinions about which writer you think would be really good for me and who's really great for you and I want to hear stories about the framed photographs of your past and leave with a long hug that stops for a visit at the small of your back to let you know I'll be thinking of you.

I was hoping I could sit by your side outside on your patio and listen to the last of the summer come alive and I watch you smile and laugh under the stars with the moonlight filling your eyes and I hope you won't mind if I tell you that you're beautiful as I slowly touch your cheek and draw your face near and look deep to see the dawn of our thoughts while I lean in and smell the sweetness of your breath and just one kiss.

I could sit down and write you a note suggesting we take off work one day and drive away and we could head anywhere you wanted to go and I'll drive slow down the winding roads that only you know, with both the windows unrolled while holding your hand.

Perhaps we could come across Cherokee Park at dusk, walk along feeling just right, getting along just fine, taking our time, talking a bit, moving along while I hum a little song about relationships that never had a chance, that were doomed from the start, usually my fault, and how I left a town in a cloud of shame and took the blame and what it felt like to sit alone holding a dead dial tone with a single tear falling a familiar trail and about how long it took to pick up the pieces of a planned future that derailed like a train wreck or about the time I felt burned by a really nice woman with her black boots and fashionable bell-bottoms. That pain has faded away: Your presence, which is now within me, shines; my life is good news, strawberries, coffee and cream.

I'm sure if we tried before dawn in the divine silence, we could unwind and sit a spell under a willow tree free from yesterday's sorrows, loving each other real well, getting along real swell while you lean back in my arms that wrap around your waist and my hands find your hands, and I'm enchanted by the smell of the sun in your hair, and you could sing a little song about love and tell me that love is

a wind that blows in and out, a surf that ebbs, washing away love that isn't meant to bind, but always leaves room for a better love to find and love is a delicate seed not sown with seasons, and its bloom and fruit is not reaped under a September moon but is harvested in its own time and only then replanted by four hands so that love can be shared within.

After finding our love, after promises have been kept, after I've read your eyes and you've read mine and we've shared about what was truly going on, after we've known each other on paper and have seen through the lines, after I tell you the whole story about being stretched out for a short time, after we've talked about God and the universe, after we've cursed and seen the hurt of an argument that's gone back and forth, after we've given all we can to prepare our higher expression — I'll surrender the life of my days to your heartbeat, and fall back and cry in your arms, in your bed in a room aglow with ache, sweat and tears, and after I feel the smooth flesh of your breast against the bare of my beating chest, I'll finally find home and dreams and laughter will be forever yours on our pillow.

•••

X

Let the incense ash and the candle burn low.
Where you are I don't know...

I'm traveling to you naked as the highest tree limb in November evening cold,
Across glistening mountain snow, melting into running valley streams,
Silhouetting the bludgeoned moon by riding the wings of all sorrow,
Soaring through heaven's blue to our golden destiny,
Easing over seven seas of prophets' dreams,
Comforting a beleaguered sailor
Swimming in his day of stormy memory,
But I'll find you... I promise.

I'm coming from yesterday's raining sunlight,
To put the sun on your face and the light in your eye,
Falling through the rolling red sky though misty circling clouds,
Lingering, touching the ground with wind-swept grace,
Carousing in golden waves shaking wheat grains,
Delighting the eyes of children in their imaginations' mirage.

I haven't forgotten you or the fallen tears between us.
I know we're a realm apart but believe in twilight's last dark,
That although the earth may move I'll always stand with you.
So sleep well now and don't give it a second thought,
With one hand finding your heart, closing Joseph's Bible.

Tales by a madman they say,
Perhaps...
But you have within you what you must do,
And only you know that.

So rest your mind,
And we'll be together again
in our shining tomorrow.

...

IFEVERA...

I was discharged from Caritas Peace this time last year where I was told I had to change and could no longer drink alcohol or smoke marijuana. I was told I needed to stay balanced, and this year I have. Before I went into the hospital I was far from it. My typical day was to work at the golf course, come home, take a shower and write. I was writing six hours a day every day and when I went to bed I would play with words in my head. I slept little if at all.

I was also under a tremendous amount of pressure. My ego thought I could somehow stop the war against Iraq, which at the time was just entering the public debate. I was aware of the likelihood of war by mid- August. I ate, slept and breathed war and anti-war.

I was lost and exhausted by mid-October, 2002. Before I wrote Conscience Alone I thought, "Now is the time to say what you've really got to say." I had been holding back until then. I thought it was so powerful. I cried when I listed spirits of God, and my knowledge of the prophets. I opened the Book of Revelation after I wrote it and went out and bought sealing wax and X, L, C stamps and envelopes. I marked the sixth letter, the right head of the "R" with a decimal point. I then opened the first envelope in front of my mother. On my first attempt I was only able to break the first and the seventh sealed letters.

I then took my infamous car ride through the night on October 22, 2002. I served a total of seven days of a ten-day jail sentence in August 2003. I got out early because I worked from four-thirty in the morning to six at night in the jail kitchen.

When I did open the sixth seal on December 12, 2002, Satan was revealed. I watched him cower, shouting in shock and surprise “Oh no, oh no!” to a woman wearing a crucifix. I won’t write who he is, because his name has no place in my book. His games are almost finished.

I have resealed those seven letters; they will be broken again during the week of Sunday, December 7th through Saturday the 13th, 2003. I hope and pray the Kingdom of God will soon follow. I believe it will.

I know I have made mistakes. I am not perfect nor would I ever wish to be so. I am adequately capable of being wrong. I’ve done things that are completely immoral and go against everything that I now believe. I pray and hope to remain teachable.

It’s been a very good year for me spiritually. A friend, a teacher, told me he had never seen such growth and change in such a short time.

This year I now pray in the morning, the evening, and at night with a candle lit. It’s a big difference in my life. I pray to God. The changes my friend remarked upon have come only through my faith in Him, which at times has faltered. Today my faith is my only asset. Faith is not an intellectual endeavor, which is why I had problems with it before. I’m learning to unlearn and to believe in what I cannot explain. I strive to be spiritual.

In closing, it’s important to share some thoughts about religion, which has been polluted to the point where it is simply neutral. Religion today may be best described as a belief of arguments and a set of divisions. Religion is not meant to be comparable but compatible, held together by tolerant men and understanding women striving to find a greater love, a higher ground of tolerance and acceptance. Yet we live in an age of tremendous conflict so it’s not surprising that we again draw religion into war and down to neutrality.

I don’t understand why some men think their words are more powerful and their means are more constructive by teaching hate instead of giving love since the eventual end of hate is internal weakness and self-destruction. I don’t understand how some men can take so much pleasure in taking instead of giving, because it’s easier to give. It takes thought and effort to take and the rewards from giving are much greater and longer lasting. I don’t see how some men can use religion and God as a scapegoat to meet unholy ends and then wish to think of themselves and their cause as holy.

I've prepared myself for what's to come in the last two weeks. I've started walking, running and lifting weights. I quit smoking. I've started to pay more attention to what people say and how they say it. My perception is getting clearer. I'm beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I've been fighting for so long that I have a hard time believing the faith that's come over me. I believe we will meet one day in a world of peace.

I've realized over this last week in my prayers and meditations that despite the molestation and those years filled with rage, my hospitalization, the death of my sister; despite the sheer madness and brutality of fraternity hazing, dropping out of college, another hospitalization and the dark days of my alcoholism; despite resuming and again dropping out of college and yet another hospitalization; despite the war on terrorism and its moments of overwhelming despair and extreme loneliness; despite waiting to go to jail, and jail itself, and having bi-polar disorder with its crippling mood swings; despite all the people who have painfully come and gone through my life — that I have been blessed, by God, my family and the teachers who have surrounded me in this last year.

There's so much I've left out, so much I haven't written, I apologize. I wish you peace and love. Through Grace, we will meet as friends in the Kingdom of God.

...

The Love Poem

— for the Bush Administration, elected to power via the Supreme Court Dec. 12, 2000,
and still has not found any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq

“My punishment is to forgive you.”

— Thomas Borge (from *The Sunflower*, by Simon Wiesenthal)

The A-Train Blues

Written and Received and Arranged by Eric Cecil, b. 4/30/77

Closing Song by Miles Davis

Flamenco Sketches (Alt. Take)

•••

Epilogue

I don't write much these days,
but I'm well and sane so they say,
have a routine of life, a small circle of friends,
all smiles as I become responsible.
Slowly chasing the American dream I suppose.
Work a nine-to-five,
with hardly any dirt under my finger nails.
Respectable and admirable they think...

I remember in Lexington,
a town filled with uneventful similar nights,
in the Fish Tank off Euclid,
drunk and ordering drinks,
and I felt like that lone leaf,
meeting a few aspiring artist friends
and I didn't have much,
but I smuggled a poem in,
and we had a semi-serious conversation
about writing and comebacks...

I've been two days without sleep, I shiver and feel it around my eyes.
I shake my head at what I once held with great importance,
what I once believed of the universe, sometimes I laugh.
I stand against a wooden pole, hear a dog, a distant howl
and tonight I'm alive, living, those blurred nights and agony gone by,
smiling into the impossible,
under our darkened sky lit by the half-moon
shining over mountains and ocean blue
and today I've survived.

I gaze at the stars, hung with our best hopes
in our worst moments by prophets and ghosts
and by children lost, remembered well within our hearts,
and I think about the past, still the past —

rub my eyes and grimace at that kaleidoscope of smooth faces
and smiles that fade in and out in fragments of conversation
with a few figments of my imagination.

I worked tables at a steak house,
hustled, filled with demons, dehydrated.
I smiled and made cash that never made it to the bank.
I was out every night or I sat at the bar at Applebee's
and used to order two drinks right at closing time,
finishing after the lights came on.

I was worn-out and dying, oblivious to the living,
pale and frighten-eyed
with an ancient wounded sorrow,
a gaping hole, an emptiness,
vacant and hopeless, whittled away,
sleepless and tired....

I look to the stars, smile, shake my head and think about an old friend —
I loved him like a true brother and he was the one who told me
I needed to “write the company,” and he talked of opening a bar.
He once told me that if he ever went to jail, somewhere
three states away, he could call me in the middle of the night
and I would bail him out and he would do the same for me.
And it just so happened....

I slept for four months, suffered on his sofa,
in a student ghetto, a run-down house with hardwood floors,
a mini refrigerator filled with beer, and the wall falling apart,
crumbling behind a tapestry put up to hide the damage.
I would wake up hating the morning,
and everything associated with it,
and it always seemed like an ambulance would scream past.
I would feel out of breath, my skin would clam over,
my heart would go beatbeatbeatbeat, the sun would sneak into that room
and hit my headache like flame hits gasoline and I would look,
and reach for a pack of cigarettes off the old yellow paint-chipped table
cluttered by a glass bong, empty beer bottles, ashtrays, empty cigarette packs

and notebooks, and I would find and smoke a cigarette,
look around at the walls of that house and catch a glimpse,
just a ray, that my life was awful,
thought there must be something better,
would find my shoes and leave,
with my shoulders hunched, head down,
feeling less than a carcass on the roadside,
wearing the clothes of last night, drenched in humiliation,
wearing shame and disgust, the unknown sickness dry in my bloodshot eyes.
I would leave before my “brother” woke up, and blow-off classes,
flunking that semester, sleeping it off until nightfall when I drank again,
again and again, and I would rest and drink again,
until I ran from Lexington.

Mike, Scott, Mark, Amy, Mike, Carter, Greg, Jeanna, Angela, Joy, Ryann and Natalie
on down the line — I think about some of them and know in my mind, in my
heart it was a lie, my life then, right down to the language we used, to the right-ons
we gave, to the clothes we wore, to the shoes we wore, to the jokes we told, to the
handshakes, courtesies, and greetings we gave that were always a little too loud
and rehearsed as if to say to the world and to those all-important watching that we
do not hurt, that all is well and normal. And I want to say more for those people
and I did love them, they meant more then, but at the end of the day, it was about
alcohol and dope and who got used? We got used, and what we talked about was
to use.

Now they’re all gone, scattered like interrupted dreams, and tonight I can hear
them across the clouds, alone or laughing too loud, drunk in death, slapping each
other on the back like they had just discovered the word “camaraderie” and in
reality they’ve gone off to die in forgone calculated numbers, slaughtered to the
beast, in closed coffins that hold tragedies that remain unspoken, in secret; or to be
jailed, to become treated like animals and humiliated, to be robbed of one’s
selfhood, one’s dignity; or to live miserable lives, sitting at home telling themselves
little lies, listening to the maniac madman — real, unseen, evil and alive —
laughing in sinister cackles at the droves, at the countless caskets he’s closed.

Some of those people were real — those artist friends who knew pain, knew
hopeless horror and wrote about it or painted it without apology, with the
necessary loneliness we all shared from lacking a common denominator with our

society, our community, a world I wanted to be loved and accepted by, but became in my own mind silently despised in an inferno of my own righteous fire fueled by own anger and bitterness over politics and war and what the world is capable of becoming.

Me? I was the chaos, was a lie and a liar, and self-destruction,
was naturally materialistic, was selfish and self-centered and am terribly vain.
I'm still the problem — now, and to come.
And sometimes it occurs to go and get a pack of cigarettes,
find Johnny Walker or make two phone calls,
and not worry about sleep or eating, not worry about living.
Or just get in my car, with my nine-to-five and take a long slow drive.
Get some cash and get in an airplane, find a European hole-in-the-wall
and spill my secrets to nobody.
To run and hide, again and again.
It's just a passing thought,
a dream of escape and return, an old dream,
wearing a worn disguise.

I look for a shooting star tonight.
I saw one once, just searching the heavens like now.
It came out of nowhere, "God, let there be peace," and returned just as quickly.
Tonight I wish, to see those old faces I sometimes miss.
To see them healthy, as their angels do, to know all is well.
I wish we could step into today with the knowledge of the present,
surrender, admit our futility and ask for help to help one another,
list and admit our faults, find our conscience, cleanse it through our confessions,
declare our sorrow and share our pain, heal our wrongs, overcome our fears,
accept our humanity, pray for and give forgiveness, learn from our experience,
spread our wisdom, find and give hope to the hopeless,
straighten our warped perceptions, look in the mirror and find our inner peace,
finally quiet questions that have gone unanswered and ask questions
that need to be asked, become completely sane, saved from our own chaos,
become human again by finding each other,
by finding God together.
And then I wish we could dream...
...just a hopeful wish.

...

Face Everything and Recover

I was in the right place at the right time during December 2009 which resulted in forgiving someone who was involved in the fraternity hazing that occurred when I was a student at WKU. I was also relieved of an obsession days after this concerning someone from the past. I felt a great sense of victory, of freedom and a desire to move my life forward. I really just finished "A-Train Blues" despite publishing it in 2006 with Theoretical Violence.

I have become much less fearful of what people will think of my ideas. I really didn't want anyone close to me to read "A-Train Blues" when it was originally published because of fear of what they might think. I put the book and my talent under my bed as a result. Most people that I have contact with don't know that I am a poet, and have published two books.

I have thoughts of where the world is going that are very different than what most people think. I am very hopeful, nearly sure of a peaceful world despite appearances. I have the hope of the writings attributed to Isaiah: "They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore."

•••

Theoretical Violence

I constructed a theory years ago that I failed to elaborate on because I believed that it was self-evident and rather simple to grasp. It explains why violence can never achieve peace. This theory also helps explain why violence has defeated human institutions such as governments, churches, mosques, temples and charitable organizations. I stated this theory, which is a true statement as $V+V=2V=2V(t)$. V representing violence, and (t) representing time.

The Judeo-Christian tradition would refer to it as, “you reap what you sow.” Hindus and Buddhists might refer to this theory as the law of karma. Most scientists and religious experts will agree that there is an underlying intelligence governing the universe through laws.

Theoretical violence indicates that violence is an energy that cannot be controlled, predicted or harnessed. This theory indicates that violence grows more powerful with the passing of time when it is not balanced by its opposite force. Einstein said, “Energy cannot be created or destroyed, it can only be changed from one form to another.” This infers that violence has been constant throughout human history. I however, believe that the energy of violence has increased, has transformed its opposite energy, thus destroying that opposite energy into more violence, so it is important to look at the role that time has in creating more violence.

Time is a stable variable, in its natural state it is neutral. It progresses constantly without regard to humanity. The reason the energy of violence has increased is because violence leaves a wake of bitterness, fear, anger and hatred. These unresolved emotions over time have created more violence which has led to the ineffectiveness of human institutions to achieve peace among people and nations.

Looking at the whole of human history it is possible that violence once served as a means to correct social problems. Perhaps violence was a viable solution. We see in various religions when war was ordered because it was believed to be God’s will. Examples are found in the Bible and it was on the battlefield that Ajuna conversed with Krishna. However, sometime in human history the consequences of violence began to outweigh the benefits of using violence. When this occurred, as it has, $V+V=2V=2V(t)$ began to add other variables.

The belief that violence solved social problems continued because it once had. This delusion persisted because many people failed to recognize that violence multiplies over time. Most failed to realize that the positive results that violence once brought had changed or were temporary and short lived. When violence changed from solution to problem is unknown, but it will never change back into a means for positive social change. This change possibly occurred because society became more complex, population too great or technology became more advanced. Violence persisted, time progressed, violence multiplied and social problems became more difficult to solve.

War eroded social institutions that were meant to balance the energy of violence as humanity began to invest more time and energy into institutions of violence then into institutions that promote social progress through non-violent means. What is troubling at present is that violence has progressed past the point that human institutions can counterbalance its energy. I acknowledge that non-violence has lost; defeat complete. To strengthen my conclusion, the world's most recent Nobel Peace Prize winner stated in his acceptance speech that, "We must begin by acknowledging the hard truth that we will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes." Violence and war has expanded its influence into every aspect of society; in an age of nuclear weapons there is not another lifetime in which to strengthen our institutions of peace. Peace has not the time left or the institutional support to counterbalance violence. I think of the end of the American Civil War and Robert E. Lee, surveying his soldiers with the will to fight, coming to the conclusion that he had not the men.

The war on terrorism is like no other war, cannot possibly be won by either side, which holds the surety of destruction of humanity. In previous wars combatants have always traded lives for land, but there is no land to win. Bitterness and fear breeds, anger rises and the energy for sustained violence has been achieved. It is by this means that violence has won, yet by this admission humanity will move forward, for victory is in surrender.

The energy of love is as sure as the energy of violence. Because our human institutions have been defeated, it is through the grace of the Creator of all energy that peace will come. Love will create a window of opportunity to heal our unresolved emotions that violence has wounded humanity with. Peace will be sustained by realizing that it is better to give our resources, than let war takes our resources; it is easier to give bread to the hungry, than to feed an army; it is less costly to give medicine to the sick, than to care for the maimed; it is greater to house the homeless, than to destroy communities; it is more sensible to educate the illiterate, than suffer from minds of ignorance.

We will rebuild our fragmented world mindful that we can only be as healthy as the sick, as wealthy as the poor, as cared for as the elderly, as loved as the mentally ill, as consoled as the crying and as peaceful as the restless. We will build upon our similarities and work for the common dreams we have for children. There is no separation between us, the borders on maps are only in our minds. Humanity has one destiny, guided by one spirituality, as the same breath of Love lives within us all. There is mercy that realizes humanity is overwhelmed by the power of violence, and can only be saved by the love of God; by loving each other.