

Memories



Poems

by

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Selected writings by Larry J. Eriksson

Poetry

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childhood memories...

A 1950s Time Trip

We didn't have a TV much less a DVR,
we listened to The Lone Ranger on the radio;
no computers, just slide rules and trig tables,
copies were made with carbon paper;
the only button we pushed was the doorbell –
life seemed simpler then.

We had a coal furnace, but no air conditioning,
no microwave ovens or frost free refrigerators,
a milkman delivered milk in glass bottles,
there were no aluminum cans or plastic bottles,
the ragman's wagon was pulled by a horse –
we didn't think much about technology.

First class postage was three cents,
no express mail and no ZIP codes,
only postal zones like West Allis 14, Wisconsin;
telephones were black with rotary dials,
numbers began with SPring 4 or GReenfield 3 –
there were fewer numbers and more words.

Houses were smaller and darker
with dusty attics filled with boxes
and a fuse box in the basement,
yards were small with alleys in back;
we played checkers and marbles –
our toys had more metal and wood, less plastic.

Doctors came to our homes,
hospital stays were longer,
dentistry was more primitive,
x-rays were used to fit shoes;
polio kept us home in the summer –
we still got measles, mumps, and chicken pox.

Our coats and boots were heavy,
there were no light weight synthetics;
cars were massive with huge trunks,
but no power steering, air conditioning,
seat belts, air bags, traction control,
tapes, CDs, GPS systems, or cell phones.

We bought gas at service stations
where they washed our windows;
there were no interstate highways,
we ate lunch at restaurants with waitresses,
stayed at small family owned motels,
and traveled at a slower pace.

My grandparents lived in a log cabin
with an outhouse – no bathroom,
no central heat just a wood stove,
an icebox filled with lake ice,
a party line phone without even a dial –
life reduced to the basics.

Elm trees formed a canopy over our streets,
dimly lit by incandescent lamps;
there were no shopping malls,
we bought groceries at main street stores
and ate supper at friendly diners
where we knew the owners.

We used trains, street cars, and trolleys,
people rarely flew on airplanes,
the rich took ocean liners to Europe,
most stayed much closer to home –
the outside world seemed bigger then,
but our own world was small.

Our Changing World

Once the milkman,
even the doctor,
came to our homes,
now we drive and wait,
saving someone
time and money.

The meter reader,
telephone operator,
and paper boy –
vanishing species
due to cell phones
and the Internet.

Fewer coal or oil trucks,
more gas pipelines;
fewer cloth diapers,
more disposables;
fewer main street shops,
more online shopping.

A new world appears,
driven by innovations
that meet someone's needs –
but do they meet ours?

The Vanishing Alley

Adults used streets
and front doors,
kids used alleys
and back doors –
playing in a world
set apart.

Attached garages
doomed the alley –
adults didn't mind,
but kids lost
their playgrounds
and meeting places.

Public places where
they could get together
any time of the day,
any day of the week,
to play, to talk,
from sunrise to sunset.

Now the auto is king –
shopping malls
and athletic clubs
have replaced the alley,
but require adults,
car rides, and money.

Private places –
clean, shiny, exclusive,
built for adults, and
restricted to those who
can afford them and
follow their rules.

The Day I Met Spahn

In the nineteen fifties,
the Milwaukee Braves’
spring training camp was
in Bradenton, Florida.

It was a more relaxed era,
you could walk on the field
and talk to the players
as they loosened up.

My brother and I
collected autographs
of our favorite players –
Andy Pafko, Eddie Matthews,
Del Crandall, Johnny Logan.

Then we saw the Braves’
star pitcher Warren Spahn,
of “Spahn, Sain, and pray for rain”
fame with the old Boston Braves,
running laps in the outfield.

We walked out to him
and asked for his autograph,
but he didn’t stop running –
told us he was too busy.

Spahn kept pitching and running
for many more years,
right into the Hall of Fame –
and we saw how he got there.



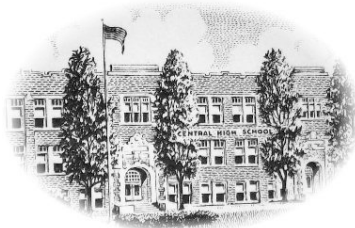
West Allis Central

The old brick high school
that I attended
after my mother, uncle,
and mother-in-law.

Once a massive showplace,
but its resident mice,
antique auditorium,
shoobox gymnasium,
and obsolete pool
led to its demolition.

The name lives on –
placed on an old building
handed down to us by
our cross-town rivals
who got a new showplace.

All I'm left with
are memories,
a fading diploma,
and one old red brick.



2204 Orrington

Attending high school, once a big deal,
then Northwestern U, a bigger deal –
overwhelmed freshman soon seeks refuge
at the campus Lutheran Center.

Sunday suppers, evening vespers,
mid-week seminars, late night study,
interesting, disturbing discussions,
learning, changing – isn't that why I came?

Colorful autumns, long cold winters,
the great snowstorm of '67,
brief springs with lilacs and crocuses
followed by early summer heat waves.

A lifestyle, connected, holistic,
theological, existential –
new ideas and warm memories
that are a lasting part of my life.

I came to study engineering,
but my years at 2204
taught me lessons about life that were
in many ways more valuable.

“Existentially speaking” I think
they helped make me what I am today,
at graduation, Pastor Mac said
“to those departing...go in peace”

...I don't think I've ever fully left.

What do I Remember?

Not the convoluted dogma,
not the long list of rules,
not the religious forms,
not the spiritual practices,

but the words of the prophets,
the psalms, the poetry,
the parables of the Gospels,
the simplicity of the stories,

the Sermon on the Mount,
the beauty of the music,
the letters of Bonhoeffer,
the writings of Tillich,

the lively communities,
the heated discussions,
the shared meals,
the time together.

quiet memories...

Family Reunion

A weathered olive tackle box,
an old gift from my grandfather,
filled with smells and tools of fishing,
fish line, bobbers, colorful lures.

Pinkies my brother and I
used to spin cast for crappies,
a chrome-plated Swedish spoon
that my dad crafted himself,
a deep-diving River Runt
added by my grandfather,
a Hula Popper purchased
soon after my father died.

An old box filled with fishing lures;
a time capsule that still evokes
fading memories of the past
and of those no longer with us.

(published in the 2013 Poets' Calendar
of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets)



The Namekagon Crossroads

At the extreme west end
of Windigo Lake and
a few miles from Hayward,
is a long, narrow bay,
where my grandparents owned
a resort for many years –
for some, Simonson’s Bay,
but Eriksson’s for me,
after my grandparents.

For years, a key portage
on a valued route, but
now almost forgotten;
today, speeding cars cross
its path without pausing –
moving too fast to hear
the echoes of early
traders and voyageurs
moving through the forest.

Long ago, they would watch
canoes traveling from
the Chippewa River
go across Windigo
and portage from the bay
to the Namekagon
on their journey from the
Mississippi River
to Lake Superior.

(expanded version of poem
published in the 2014 Poets’
Calendar of the Wisconsin
Fellowship of Poets)



Dusk in Summer

The dark streets are quiet,
the window lights glowing
as children go to bed,
the day draws to a close.

The humid air is ripe
with the fullness of life,
leaves hanging motionless,
not a whisper of air.

Clicking lawn sprinklers
water the thirsty grass,
the hose glistens with
silver beads of moisture.

Clusters of lightning bugs
flitter in the shadows,
punctuating the dark
with bursts of gentle light.

A full moon emerges
above towering trees –
large, luminous, and orange,
diffusing its pale light.

A soft composition
of peace and contentment
to treasure and recall
on a cold winter night.

(published in *Peninsula Pulse*, Mar. 29, 2013)



Forest Eclipse

pinhole camera: a camera using a small hole to form an inverted image of a scene

Sunlight flickers through
the leaves and branches
of the towering
forest canopy,

Tiny openings
between moving leaves
form evanescent
pinhole cameras,

Focusing the Sun's
distant beams of light
to create sun spots
that skip and gambol
on the forest floor,

During an eclipse,
as the moon occults
the face of the sun,
the circlets of light
slowly erode into
sparkling images
of a crescent Sun,

Filling the air with
dancing lunulas
like fluttering birds –
ecliptical wonder
from nature's lenses.

Old Newport

Overlooking a sandy beach
on the Door Peninsula,

I see the homes and shops
of a lakeshore village,
fishing boats at the pier,
struggling businesses
waiting the arrival
of the railroad tracks –

But as time went by,
the tracks went no farther
than Sturgeon Bay,
the village stopped growing,
buildings were abandoned,
the pier torn apart by storms,

Years later, the remains
were removed to make way
for Newport State Park,
leaving only memories
of an old ghost town
with a promising past.





Whitefish Bay Ruins

One bright sunny day,
a young couple came
to a creek flowing
into Whitefish Bay
on Lake Michigan
to admire and sketch
old fishing sheds that
were nearing collapse.

Forty years later,
they returned again,
the old sheds were gone,
no evidence of
that day so long ago,
except in their minds –
now mixed with memories
of their long life together.



work memories...

Garage Businesses

A 30 year old tool maker,
with war time experience
producing superchargers,
started his own business
in a garage behind his house.

Success came rather quickly,
but it never grew as big as
Apple or Hewlett-Packard –
famous businesses also
with their roots in garages.

But it did grow and prosper,
serving the community,
providing productive jobs,
supporting his family –
who needs to be famous?



Life at the Edge

Innovators with vision
search along the edges,
looking for new solutions
to difficult problems,
forming new businesses
around their ideas.

But as companies grow,
the founders soon find
no place for their talents;
they are less productive
even as the business
becomes more successful.

While conceding that
this is what they wanted,
they must depart and
renew their lives before
they are consumed by
the fire they have started.



Last Day at Work

Another drive to work
on a gray March morning,
not much is left to do,
conference call at 10,
then a brief staff meeting,
send out a few emails,
say good-bye to some friends,
doesn't take very long,

soon it is time to leave,
pack up the old briefcase,
turn off the office lights,
pause for one final look,
then walk down the hall,
close the door to the past
and step into the future.



Postmodern Times

Cities are less crowded
Streets are cleaner
Yards are neater

There is more plastic
There are more lights
There are more cameras

There is less smoke
There are fewer odors
There is less noise

But, where are the builders?
Where are the farmers?
Where are the workers?

More and more people
Fewer and fewer workers
How do things get done?

senior thoughts...

Storm Clouds

Unexpected news,
you have a malignancy,
a kick in the gut.

Surgical bargain –
you want to be well again,
not too much to ask?

A small incision,
working on you inside out,
wanting to go home.

The incision heals,
favorable prognosis,
normal life returns.

The storm soon passes,
over but not forgotten,
dark clouds can return.

Recovery

Getting well is like
leaving a long dark tunnel
and seeing the sun.

Repeating Moments

Walking your kids to school,
swimming laps at the Y,
shopping for groceries –
finding the rhythms of life.

Entering your office,
driving home at sunset,
sleeping in your own bed –
living daily cycles.

Driving past your old house,
visiting your home town,
seeing your old high school –
rewinding memories.

Taking grand kids to school,
helping out your children,
consoling your parents –
crossing generations.

Walking a well worn path,
watching an old movie,
retracing past travel –
revisiting the past.

Relaxing together,
holding you in my arms,
recalling life's journey –
renewing endless love.

Insomnia

Tossing and turning,
searching for comfort,
a cascade of thoughts
rushes through my head,
from trivial concerns
to profound questions,
from personal thoughts
to global worries.

Troubles from the past
spiral through my mind,
some simply absurd,
tangled with concerns
over the future –
worrying about
my grandchildren and
the world we leave them.

Trapped in overdrive,
no way to slow down,
the room feels too hot –
no need for covers,
tossing and turning,
trying to sleep as
time stands still in the
middle of the night.

Advice From a Grandfather

When I was young, I went
to my parents for advice,

As I grew older, I talked
with my friends about my problems,

When I became a father, I helped
my children work through their concerns,

Now that I am a grandfather,
I am more hesitant
when asked for advice –

My wisdom is based
on years of experience
living in a world
that no longer exists.



On Old Age

As you grow older,
the pressures of work
are soon forgotten.

Some problems remain –
health concerns arise,
old friends pass away.

But life is pleasant,
who wants to relive
problems of their youth?

Then a young couple
quickly cycles by,
pumping and smiling.

Full of life, flying
into their future –
oh, to be young again!



postscript...



Canine Therapy

My white bichon,
Misty, says that
she loves taking
walks in the woods –
the trees help her
get in touch with
her inner wolf.

(published in the chapbook,
What Is Hidden, vol. IV,
Dickinson Poetry Series, 2013)

About the author

Larry J. Eriksson is a Wisconsin writer and poet living in Madison and Ellison Bay with his wife, Karen. He is a member of the Poetry Group of the UU Fellowship of Door County and the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets. His poems preserve memories, clarify thoughts, explore feelings, or simply have fun with language. They have appeared in *The Capitol Times*, the *Peninsula Pulse*, *Verse Wisconsin*, *Equinox*, the *Poets' Calendar* of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, and the chapbooks *No Breath is Lost* and *What Is Hidden* published by the Dickinson Poetry Series. His chapbooks *Moonlight*, *Moments*, *Mysteries*, *Music*, *MindGames*, *Marching*, and *Memories* are available at www.quartersectionpress.com. For over 30 years, he worked as a research engineer and manager specializing in acoustics, noise control, and signal processing, and has a B.S.E.E. from Northwestern University, an M.S.E.E. from the University of Minnesota, and a Ph.D. in electrical engineering from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is the author of many published technical papers, chapters in two engineering books, and two books on sociopolitical issues: *Business Decisions: the impact of corporate mergers and global capitalism on our lives* and *Broken Strings, Missing Notes: strengthening democracy and seeking justice in a nation out of tune*. In addition to writing, he enjoys reading, playing the violin, swimming, and cycling.



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