

# *MindGames*



Poems

by

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Poetry

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*Moments* (2011)

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# *exploring time and space...*

## *Pit Stop*

After miles on the road,  
cycling across the county,  
I rest on a wooden bench  
enjoying the summer sun.

As I gaze at some sand dunes,  
a bright monarch flutters by  
and lands on the black head tube  
at the front of my road bike.

It pauses in the sunlight,  
body aligned with the frame,  
colorful wings unfolded,  
resting on its high tech perch.

A perfect composition  
of patterns in orange and black,  
fragility combined with  
rugged graphite composite.

The moment passes too fast  
and the butterfly flies off,  
our brief meeting has ended,  
and I return to the road.

(inspired by an incident at Newport  
State Park in Door County)



## *Along the Glacial Drumlin Trail*

The late summer sun bakes the concrete plaza,  
a white 12 speed bicycle stands next to a small store,  
the rider stretches his legs while drinking a cold cola,  
a large canopy shades the pumps from the hot sun.

A red riding mower pulls in from Main Street,  
parks at a pump in front of a white FedEx truck,  
next to the truck is a white Pontiac Bonneville,  
a John Deere garden tractor stops next to the mower.

The hood on a huge Salvation Army truck stands open,  
three men climb around the engine compartment,  
a stream of pink coolant drips out of the truck,  
one of the men returns with a hose clamp.

A blue Mini and an old Fiero fill their tanks,  
a young mother walks the street with her son and dog,  
the red riding mower retraces its route up Main Street,  
the Deere garden tractor pulls out and heads south.

The bicyclist talks with the young driver of the Fiero,  
an interesting car even after 190,000 miles  
and with a jagged hole in the front right fender,  
then returns to the trail to follow the setting sun.

(this is an expanded version of the poem, "Deerfield Diorama,"  
published in the 2011 Poets' Calendar of the Wisconsin  
Fellowship of Poets and the chapbook *Moments*)



## *Night Ride*

I was twelve years old,  
dusk was closing in  
as I rode my bike  
through the neighborhood  
with some of my friends.

It was that special time  
of the day, not light,  
but still not quite dark;  
fireflies were flashing  
as we cruised along.

Past time to go home,  
but we kept riding  
in the dim twilight,  
wishing our night ride  
would last forever.

My bike was flying  
as friends grew distant  
and night sounds faded;  
I raced alone through  
blocks of time and space.

Only memories  
of the past remained,  
then a road appeared  
with sounds and streetlights  
as my bike rolled on.

I heard the voices  
of my granddaughters  
emerge from the dark,  
we rode together,  
a peloton of three.

They soon moved ahead  
seeking the future  
in the cool night air  
and soft gray shadows  
of deserted streets.

Stars slowly emerged  
from the fading light,  
I was an old man  
and wished this night ride  
would last forever.



*Partners on a Leash*

Walking down a quiet lane  
outside of Ellison Bay,  
surrounded by the dark waters  
of chilly Lake Michigan,  
my white bichon, Misty, tugs  
at the sharp end of her leash.

Polaris attracts my gaze  
until Misty pauses and  
begins a low, rolling growl  
when a coyote draws near;  
I snatch Misty off the ground  
wanting no bait on a leash.

She continues her deep growl,  
more of a bluff than real threat,  
but it does reassure me  
as the coyote turns back,  
and we quickly return home  
bound by the ends of our leash.

(a different approach to a story treated  
earlier in “The Fellowship of the  
Leash” in *Moments*)

*Nosing Around the Alley*

The sweet perfume of lilacs  
and the earthy fragrance of  
gardens mulched with grass clippings.

The pungent stench of garbage,  
the noxious smell of decay,  
the fetor of dead critters.

The familiar essence  
of oil and gasoline fumes  
in musty old garages.

The aromas of dinners  
drifting through the neighborhood  
as the day comes to an end.

(published in the 2012 Poets' Calendar  
of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets)



## *connecting...*

### *First Date*

They were childhood friends,  
growing up together,  
classmates through high school.

After graduation,  
they left home to go  
to different schools  
and different worlds.

Over the holidays,  
a brief phone call  
led to their first date,  
but their lives had changed  
and they had changed –  
they were starting over.

Mystery replaced familiarity  
and romance blossomed –  
life became filled  
with possibilities.

## *Marital Alchemy*

Newlyweds united in love  
overflowing with dreams and desires  
begin their new life together,  
where each day is a special gift.

The daily rhythms of living  
weave a family tapestry  
of joys, challenges, happiness,  
and wedding anniversaries.

Some pass by without much notice –  
paper, silk, crystal, and china;  
a special pause for silver, but  
pearl and ruby rarely mentioned.

After fifty years together,  
the alchemy of time mixed with  
love and hope works its magic and  
transmutes the common into gold.

A noble metal honoring  
a noble anniversary,  
celebrating old memories  
and anticipating new ones.

## *Alternative Universes*

Somewhere Matt Dillon is a marshall and  
Kitty operates the Longbranch Saloon;  
Palladin is traveling with his gun and  
Trigger is riding with Buttermilk.

Ralph Kramden is a tired bus driver and  
Ed Norton is fixing leaky toilets;  
Dr. Hartley has sessions with Mr. Carlin  
and Mary's hat soars in the Crystal Court.

Fleischman is a doctor in Cicely  
and St. Elsewhere heals inside its snow globe;  
Quincy and Jordan Cavanaugh create  
and solve problems as medical examiners.

The A Team's plans are coming together  
and Eppes uses Numbers to solve crimes;  
Dick Loudon lives his life in a dream and  
BJ wants to go home to Mill Valley.

Fictional characters live in our minds  
long after the last show is telecast –  
just as our younger selves remain alive  
in memories of a vanished past.

## *special communities...*

### *New Friends*

The soft light flashes,  
a pleasant chime sounds,  
the doors slide open  
and we shuffle in,  
pushing together  
as we stay apart,  
an accidental  
community in  
an elevator.

### *String Ensemble*

Rushing home from work,  
finishing dinner,  
gathering at school,  
finding our places,  
carefully tuning,  
watching our leader,  
the moment arrives,  
we play our first note,  
and become a group –  
musical magic.

### *At the Top*

After an early start,  
each group of climbers works  
their way up the mountain,  
meeting at the summit,  
a community formed  
for the special moment  
when the new day begins  
with a brilliant sunrise.

### *A Movable Community*

Coming together  
for a long bike ride,  
one thousand cyclists  
riding alone, but  
moving together,  
passing each other,  
meeting at rest stops,  
talking on the move,  
enjoying the end.



# *engineering...*

## *The Magic of Math*

pi times the diameter equals  
the circumference of a circle,  
e is the base of natural logs,  
i is the square root of minus one –  
unfamiliar transcendental,  
even imaginary numbers.

e to the power of i times pi  
is minus one – amazing answer,  
simplicity from complexity  
in the strange world of mathematics.

## *The Sorcerer's Broomsticks*

A long line of steel  
transmission towers  
marching together  
across fields of grain,  
holding power lines  
under outstretched arms.

Sorcerer's broomsticks  
moving megawatts  
with no moving parts,  
electric power  
for distant cities –  
engineers' magic.



## *It Started With a Spark*

A walk on a rug  
causes tiny sparks,  
tall trees and kite strings  
attract lightning bolts,  
a small bar magnet  
affects a compass,  
a voltaic cell  
produces current.

Moving magnets start  
current in a wire,  
current through a wire  
deflects a compass,  
our understanding  
of dynamic fields  
brought together by  
Maxwell's equations.

Now we have power  
for lights and motors,  
television sets,  
microprocessors,  
high speed computers,  
personal smart phones,  
and the Internet  
covering the world.

And it all began  
with a few sparks and  
a simple magnet.

## *Ode to Computers*

Early computers spent most of their time  
being repaired due to frequent failures;  
programs ran overnight and were rerun  
if one card was lost or out-of-order;  
time share services were painfully slow  
if the systems had too many users.

Personal computers brought fast response,  
but had modest memories, slow tape drives,  
and clattering mechanical printers;  
hardware improved with faster processors,  
more memory, and internal hard drives;  
software bugs still forced regular re-boots.

Today, memories and hard drives are huge,  
system software continues to improve;  
computers act like they know what you want,  
but they're not as smart as it sometimes seems,  
are subject to viruses and hackers,  
and require continual upgrading.

...almost makes you want to return  
to paper, pencils, and slide rules.



## *hard thoughts...*

### *Reaching Our Dreams*

We all have our dreams;  
if you are lucky  
some dreams come true.

Perhaps we do find our soulmate  
and raise a happy family;  
perhaps we have  
a bit of worldly success.

But not all dreams come true:  
some turn out to be  
less than we had hoped,  
some are lost with time,  
some take on new forms.

As we grow older,  
it becomes harder  
to tell the difference.

## *Hope for the Past*

It's been said that  
forgiveness occurs  
when you give up all hope  
for a better past.\*

Others say that they  
remain hopeful –  
even for the past.\*\*

Perhaps different ways  
of saying that  
the past is redeemed  
when you accept it  
and let it go.

The good and the bad,  
the happy and the sad,  
successes and failures –  
accepted as part  
of the life that we live.

\*often attributed to Lily Tomlin

\*\* Robert Frost quoted in “Thanks, Robert Frost”  
by David Ray

## *Vernal Bonfire*

The vernal equinox brings  
the welcome return of light  
with longer days, shorter nights;  
the growing season draws near,  
perhaps celebrated with  
dancing and even greasepaint.

I prefer the festival  
called “the burning of the socks”  
observed in Annapolis  
by the owners of small boats  
to welcome warmer weather  
when no one needs to wear socks.

I think of it as burning  
leftover smells from our past,  
leaving space for renewal,  
as in the days of our youth  
when we went around barefoot  
and the future was open.

We are free to plant new seeds  
or try some old favorites,  
to take a new direction  
or revisit an old one,  
and enter a new season  
with our old socks left behind.

(read at UUFDC Service in Ephraim, Mar. 27, 2011;  
published in *Equinox* broadside, Spring, 2011)



*My “Frazilled” Mind*

A cold winter night,  
temperatures falling,  
freezing the spray  
from a waterfall.

Tiny ice crystals  
seed the formation  
of frazil ice  
in a rushing river.

A slushy soup  
of ice and water  
ebbing and flowing  
like a stream of lava.

Gurgling its way  
down the valley,  
gently soothing  
my “frazilled” mind.

(inspired by a video of frazil ice, an icy slush  
formed by ice crystals in water too turbulent to  
freeze solid, flowing down a river  
in Yosemite National Park)

## *on writing...*

### *Special Collections in the Library Annex*

The room of abandoned books,  
obscure novels and treatises  
that are too long, too boring,  
with too many ideas  
that demand too much  
from the reader.

The room of burned books,  
filled with the ashes of volumes  
that challenged religious beliefs  
or used unacceptable language,  
that sought to create change  
or threatened those in power.

The room of unfinished books,  
thick stacks of manuscripts  
some with no beginning,  
others that go nowhere  
some with missing chapters  
still others with no ending.

The room of unwritten books  
by authors yet to be born,  
a room full of empty shelves  
awaiting news from the future,  
written with new words  
to describe a new world.

(inspired by “The Library of Babel,” a  
short story by Jorge Luis Borges, and  
the “Cemetery of Forgotten Books”  
described in *The Shadow of the Wind*  
by Carlos Ruiz Zafón)

## *Becoming a Poet*

Hearing my no-nonsense father  
recite the Deacon's Masterpiece,  
Shakespeare, and other poetry  
from memory in my childhood.

Enjoying the poetry of  
Ecclesiastes and Proverbs,  
the romance of the Song of Songs,  
and the verses of well-known hymns.

Reading that "a soldier of the  
legion lay dying in Algiers..."  
from the poem Bingen on the Rhine  
in Stephen Crane's *The Open Boat*.

Learning poetry in high school  
filled with ringing bells and ravens –  
wondering why e. e. cummings  
was allowed to drop capitals.

Recognizing the power of  
poetic language to persuade  
in an unforgettable way  
in debate and forensics.

Finding poetic beauty in  
the discoveries of physics,  
the formulas of chemistry,  
and the proofs of mathematics.

Using poetry to express  
love and humor, sadness and grief,  
to explore unanswered questions,  
to probe the limits of knowledge.

Discovering our world is filled  
with the music of poetry –  
a cosmic mystery driven  
by rhythms, rhymes, and riddles.

## *cycles of life...*

### *Solstice Sunrise*

Soft pre-dawn light fills the air,  
fresh white snow gleams on the grass,  
the trees reflect a pink glow,  
a brilliant crescent moon  
shines high in the pale blue sky –

Two contrails rise in the east,  
white arrows crossing above  
with tails of feathery swirls,  
a narrow line of clouds glows  
in shades of yellow and gold –

Signs of the still hidden sun  
whose late rising announces  
the start of another day  
and suddenly erases  
the sweet subtlety of light.



## *Renewal*

The small bud unfolds,  
becoming a lush green leaf  
soaking up the sun.

Rain falls and winds blow  
as summer thunderstorms rage,  
but the leaf hangs tight.

The days grow shorter,  
rich green fades to autumn brown,  
winter chill returns.

Some leaves fall early,  
while others are more stubborn,  
refusing to drop.

Snow covers the ground,  
branches are bare skeletons  
with no signs of life.

Then one warm spring day,  
a new bud starts to open,  
soon to be a leaf.



### *Repetition*

We live in a world filled with examples of the economy of nature; a handful of basic ideas, described by mathematics, are used over and over again, generating countless connections and parallels, analogies and metaphors – forming loops and circles that lead us back to where we started.



### *The Creation Gourd*

The circle of the Earth –  
patterns of trees and water,  
the circle of the cosmos –  
stars sprinkled across the sky,  
the stem of an umbilical cord  
leading to the Big Bang  
where time and space began,  
the Universe reflected  
in the Creation Gourd.



*postscript...*

*Late Arrival*

North winds prolonging winter cold,  
late snowfalls covering the grass,  
no flowers or leaves emerging,  
the seed catalog wearing thin,  
and cabin fever getting worse,  
unbelievable as it sounds,  
the equinox came late this year.



(a March snowfall)

## *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*, the *Poets' Calendar* of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, the chapbook *No Breath is Lost* published by the Dickinson Poetry Series, *Verse Wisconsin*, and *Equinox*. His chapbooks *Moonlight*, *Moments*, *Mysteries*, *Music*, *MindGames*, and *Marching* are available at [www.quartersectionpress.com](http://www.quartersectionpress.com). For over 30 years, he worked as a research engineer and manager specializing in acoustics, noise control, and signal processing. 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* (2002) and *Broken Strings, Missing Notes: strengthening democracy and seeking justice in a nation out of tune* (2005). In addition to writing, he enjoys reading, playing the violin, swimming, and cycling.



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