

# *Moments*



Poems

by

Larry J. Eriksson

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*moments in time and space...*

*Christmas Trees*

One evening in December,  
a tree appeared in our house  
sparkling with ornaments  
and colorful lights,  
surrounded by a small village  
and tiny toy train.

We grew to love this tree  
and its fragrant aroma  
as we watched the people  
in the small village  
walk but never move,  
and the train circle the tree.

Later in January  
the tree vanished,  
its roots weren't too deep,  
along with the people,  
tiny train, and lights,  
like the bursting of a bubble.

One of a string of bubbles  
that forms and reforms each year,  
moments in time and space,  
some large, some small,  
comprising the fragile chain  
that is our life.

## *Touching*

a match igniting a campfire  
a wrecking ball smashing a wall  
a wire sparking against the ground

a runner pounding the pavement  
a plane landing on a runway  
a tire rolling down a highway

a leaf settling on the ground  
a rain drop hitting a puddle  
a snowflake melting on your tongue

a baby grasping your finger  
a child holding your hand  
an arm offering assistance

a letter connecting two friends  
a word supporting another  
a glance conveying a story

a crash startling two walkers  
a bump spilling a coffee cup  
a touch sudden and electric

a caress joining two lovers  
a presence warm and inviting  
a moment extending through time

*childhood moments...*

*Nighttime in the  
Menomonee River Valley  
(ca. 1955)*

The streets are dark and quiet as  
Milwaukee lies sleeping at night,  
but the lights shine brightly in the  
Menomonee River valley.

Hear the screaming and whining  
of rotating machinery  
punctuated by the pulses  
of powerful pounding presses.

See the workers silhouetted  
before the fiery fury  
of industrial furnaces  
in waves of suffocating heat.

Smell the solvents from paint booths and  
the acrid fumes from welder's work  
mixed with the distant aromas  
of chocolate and baker's yeast.

A world apart that never rests,  
producing the products we need,  
invisible to most of us,  
a mixture of heaven and hell.

(inspired by childhood business trips with my dad  
to a Milwaukee heat treating plant at night)

## *Life on the Alley*

I still remember  
life on the alley,

running and playing  
full court basketball  
between backboards on  
facing garages,

watching our neighbors  
weeding their gardens  
and washing their cars,

playing hide and seek  
in the evening  
among the fireflies,

but more than all these,  
I see the garage  
where my dad started  
the tool and die shop  
that supported our family.



*special moments...*

*Old Friends, Never to Meet Again*

The last time we talked,  
we were at the bottom of the stairs  
of the big house  
where we often studied,  
a long conversation  
about life's great questions  
at the end of our senior year in college,  
but it soon got late, and we parted,  
never to meet again...

but we did –  
six years later in a remote valley  
of the Smoky Mountains,  
driving east with my young family,  
the visit was brief, our conversation halting,  
the easy rhythm of our student years  
lost in the fog of time and distance,  
and so we soon drove on,  
never to meet again...

but we did –  
twenty years later through an email  
prompted by a notice  
in our alumni newsletter  
about a book I had written,  
we exchanged a few more emails  
after I sent a copy of my book  
and soon returned to our lives,  
never to meet again...

but...

*Walking the Dog*

man and dog walking  
coyote threatens, dog growls  
partners on a leash

(written with Karen Eriksson)

*The Fellowship of the Leash*

The brotherhood of the rope,  
two mountaineers joined for safety,  
the leader moving at the sharp end,  
trusting each other with their lives,  
on belay, one protects the other  
as they climb up the mountain,  
off belay, they move together,  
if one falls, they both fall.

The fellowship of the leash,  
a dog and a man joined for a walk,  
the dog walking at the sharp end,  
watching out for each other,  
approached by a coyote,  
the dog lets out a rolling growl,  
they turn and return home,  
moving as one tied to the leash.

*sporting moments...*

*Catching a Wave*

Watching the waves approach,  
the surfer picks a crest,  
where he can place his board  
and slide down its steep face.

The advancing wave keeps  
the board high on its crest  
so he can keep riding  
along the rolling sea.

Perpetual motion.

(inspired by watching surfers  
at Pensacola Beach, Florida)



## *Lap Swimming*

Dark winter morning,  
take a quick shower,  
open the pool door  
and smell the chlorine.

Enter the water,  
put on your goggles,  
a hard push from the wall  
kicking and stroking.

Nearing the far end,  
finishing one length,  
pay attention now  
time to start the turn.

Keep counting the laps,  
don't forget to breathe,  
watch other swimmers,  
stay clear of the wall.

Thinking about life,  
thoughts start to wander,  
worries distract and  
you begin to slow.

Must pick up the pace,  
focus on swimming,  
find the right rhythm,  
how many laps left?

(inspired by many years of morning lap swims)



## *Riding the Century*

Months of training – lonely rides, flat tires,  
heat and rain, wayward deer, coyotes,  
a surprise meeting with a ground hog –  
a thousand miles of preparation.

Getting an early start on ride day,  
joining an endless stream of riders.  
A blanket of fog covers the fields,  
morning miles and hills pass by quickly.

Grabbing breakfast at the first rest stop,  
a bagel with cream cheese and some fruit.  
Time to stretch and take a bathroom break,  
back on the road in fifteen minutes.

Riding along the shore of Green Bay  
beneath the towering rocky bluffs  
of the Niagara Escarpment  
surrounded by ancient, gnarled cedars.

Coasting through Egg Harbor and Fish Creek,  
climbing the infamous Juddville Hill,  
passing through Peninsula State Park,  
taking a break for more food and drink.

Visiting Ephraim and Sister Bay,  
scanning Lake Michigan while passing  
through Bailey's Harbor and Jacksonport,  
the endless miles start to take their toll.

Looking forward to the next rest stop,  
legs burning, seat sore, needing a walk.  
Recharged by a piece of cherry pie,  
twenty miles until the finish line.

Working to grind out the final miles  
until the end finally arrives –  
exhaustion limits celebration  
after one hundred miles on a bike.

(inspired by the Door County Century ride)

### *Deerfield Diorama*

A rest stop on the Glacial Drumlin Trail,  
the hot summer sun bakes the gas station.  
A bicycle leans against a brick wall;  
the rider relaxes with a cold drink.

A riding mower pulls in from Main Street  
stopping in front of a white FedEx truck.  
A John Deere garden tractor soon follows  
parking near a Pontiac Bonneville.

A Salvation Army truck with raised hood,  
three men study the engine compartment.  
A stream of coolant drips onto the ground.  
One of the men returns with a hose clamp.

The diorama slowly dissolves as  
the riding mower retraces its route north  
and the garden tractor drives south on Main –  
the cyclist fades to a vanishing dot.

(published in the 2011 Poets' Calendar  
of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets)



## *Climbing Long's Peak*

Crawling out of our little tent,  
we shiver in the morning cold,  
packing food and water bottles,  
leaving the trail head before dawn.

Walking with flashlights through dark woods,  
reaching the tree line and tundra,  
a deer crosses the path ahead  
as the trail winds up the steep slope.

Crossing the immense boulder field,  
we take a path from rock to rock  
with frequent stops in the thin air,  
getting closer to the Keyhole.

Reaching the ridge line overlook,  
a military jet roars down  
the deep valley in front of us  
shattering the mountain silence.

Finding the trail above icy  
from yesterday's August snowfall,  
we decide not to continue  
despite a morning of hard work.

Leaving only six hundred feet  
from the summit of the mountain,  
we want to return home safely  
and live to climb another day.

(inspired by a hike on Long's Peak  
in Rocky Mountain National Park)

*family moments...*

*At a Northwoods Grill*

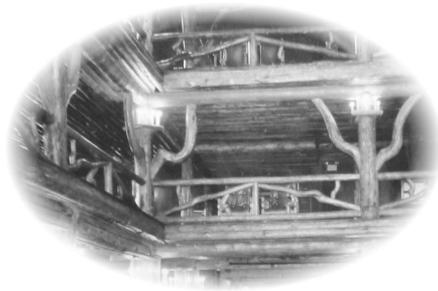
Relaxing at the end of a long day  
on an inviting flagstone patio,  
golden sunlight filtering through the trees.

An older couple eating by themselves,  
just like their first date fifty years ago,  
chat about their children and grandchildren.

A young man and woman playing ping-pong,  
volleying in a slow, polite fashion,  
smile at each other when she scores a point.

A child enjoying a slice of pizza,  
watching the people eating and playing,  
surveys the world she soon will inherit.

(inspired by a dinner  
in Door County, Wisconsin)



### *Anniversary at Old Faithful*

Final wisps of steam,  
Old Faithful recharges  
as night settles in.  
Mars rises in the east  
above hills and trees,  
red and luminous.

Candle light sparkles,  
a violinist plays  
on the balcony  
of the old log inn  
filling the lobby  
with graceful music.

Diners eat and drink,  
aromas drift by,  
pleasant sights and sounds  
closing a good day  
celebrating years  
of love together.

(inspired by a summer evening  
at the Old Faithful Inn in Yellowstone National Park  
when Mars was unusually close to the earth)

*musical moments...*

*A Violin's Life*

Made almost one hundred years ago,  
the old man's violin, rarely played,  
sat in silence on a closet shelf,  
an abandoned musical relic.

Unseen and unheard in its black case,  
the strings of the aging violin  
began breaking one by one until  
the bridge fell over in the tangle.

After the old man died, his wife gave  
the broken instrument to their son,  
an heirloom too valued to discard  
and too damaged to use or display.

Thinking of playing the violin,  
the son took it to a music shop  
where they told him, to his great surprise,  
that it could be easily repaired.

With new strings, resetting the bridge,  
repairing an open body seam,  
installing a new peg and tailgut,  
the violin was as good as new.

Violins are built to be repaired  
and can survive for hundreds of years,  
no one really owns a violin,  
it is just on loan from the future.

(inspired by my father's violin)

## *The Student Violinist*

with bow moving  
across the strings  
the music starts  
sounds from the past  
an old violin  
returns to life

tempo increases  
fingers flying  
hopping skipping  
too little time  
too many notes  
too much music

bow moves faster  
fingers searching  
tapping punching  
stepping along  
an urgent march  
across the staff

pinkie struggles  
to reach its notes  
shorter than most  
not yet as strong  
it keeps trying  
no time to rest

## *Music from the Bow*

The violin gets applause,  
but the bow controls the sound.  
The left hand selects the notes;  
the right hand makes the music.

Through the movement of the bow  
play music you want to hear.  
Use big strokes to play *forté*;  
small strokes to play *piano*.

Create a clear stream of notes  
through continual movement.  
Keep string crossings smooth without  
hesitation or delay.

Make long down bows reach the tip  
and long up bows find the frog.  
Manage the bow to create  
your own musical painting.

*sad moments...*

*Certified Anger*

An ornate certificate framed on the wall documenting the marriage of two lovers, covered with signatures and gold lettering, Biblical passages, and scenes from nature.

Speaking with symbols from a bygone era, the old certificate is cracked and yellowed, with its most dominating feature being a ragged tear running from top to bottom.

Perhaps ripped in half by an angry partner as the result of a heated argument over some disagreement or transgression, mute testimony to marital conflict.

However, as I reflect on the damage and what might have generated such anger, I wonder less about who tore it in half and more about who chose to keep the pieces.

(inspired by a torn marriage certificate discovered in some old family papers)



## *Tearful Times*

Watching your children leave home for school,  
packing their young lives into old boxes,  
moving into dorms filled with new friends,  
returning home in an empty car.

Leaving home after the kids have left,  
watching the movers pack up your life,  
walking alone through bare hollow rooms,  
seeing the past in marks on the walls.

Saying good-bye after years at work,  
cleaning an office filled with the past,  
seeing old friends for a last farewell,  
closing the door on a way of life.

Thinking about departed parents,  
remembering good times from the past,  
entering a future in which you  
are the oldest family member.

*quiet moments...*

*Autumn In Polk County*

Golden sun rising in a deep blue sky.  
Clouds of fog billowing in the valley  
past old brick buildings and narrow bridges.

Visions of log rafts floating at boomsite.  
Rocky bluffs rising above the river.  
Dark forests calling north of highway eight.

Narrow country roads winding through the hills.  
A rope swinging above a rushing stream.  
Water splashing over three small spillways.

Sunlight reflecting from a quiet pond.  
Leaves falling in an abandoned millrace  
with no water or mill to grind the grain.

*Two Black Crows*

a crisp autumn day  
brilliant burning bushes  
drifts of fallen leaves

quiet tree lined streets  
comfortable new houses  
waiting for winter

lawns of lush green grass  
gardens of colorful mums  
wilted impatiens

a tall metal pole  
light fixture on a long arm  
two black crows watching

a soft wind arises  
the crows soar into the sky  
an empty tableau



### *Five Cranes*

A warm summer evening  
bathed in the fading sunlight,  
waving leaves silhouetted  
against a clear golden sky.

Five cranes fly high overhead  
flapping their powerful wings,  
then gliding for a moment,  
before resuming their flight.

Disappearing to the south  
over a dark line of trees,  
barking coyotes signal  
day's end as darkness descends.

*Sounds From the Past*

Each summer as a child,  
I would walk up the stone steps  
of the old log cabin.

The screen door would squeak as  
I entered the kitchen  
of my grandparents' house.

A home of varnished logs  
with joints of black chinking  
to keep out winter winds.

Nestled deep in the woods,  
a special place filled with  
good smells and warm feelings.

Now fifty years later,  
our retreat in the woods  
also has a screen door.

When I open the door,  
it squeaks and brings back  
memories of times past.

I think of the log house  
and see my grandparents  
sitting in the kitchen.



## *About the author*

Larry J. Eriksson is a Wisconsin writer and poet living in Madison and Ellison Bay with his wife, Karen. 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 his chapbooks *Moonlight*, *Moments*, *Mysteries*, and *Music*. He is a member of the Poetry Group of the UU Fellowship of Door County and the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets. 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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