

MoodSwings



Poems

by

Larry J. Eriksson

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Poetry

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Mysteries (2011)

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MindGames (2012)

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Why Not Chip Seal?

The highway guys say
they can fix our tennis court,
but we turned them down.

Loose stones and dust clouds
make it hard to play on a
chip sealed tennis court.

questioning...

What's In a Name?

Names progress in cycles,
old favorites fade away,
new names grow popular,
and then the old return.

From Florence and Emma
to Nancy and Susan,
soon replaced in turn by
Sydney and Samantha.

Many come from flowers,
Rose, Iris, or Lily,
Daisy or Violet –
no tulips or pansies.

Others come from plants,
Holly, Fern, or Willow,
Laurel or Olivia –
but no oak, elm, or birch.

Fruit names are less common,
Cherry, sometimes Melon –
but you don't often see
an apple, orange, or pear.

Biblical names have long
been popular choices,
Matthew, James, or Jacob,
Hannah, Ruth, or Sarah.

>>>

Some names come from places
like Ashley or Haylie;
others reflect a skill,
like Piper or Tyler.

Nicknames are often used,
such as Bob, Bill, or Jim,
but can be given names
standing on their own.

A more recent trend is
to make new names from old
by changing their spelling –
Danielle becomes Donyelle.

But what's in a name?
does the right name make
a flower smell sweeter
or a bad book better?

Pretty names sell flowers,
clever titles sell books,
powerful names sell cars,
short names win elections.

The aura of our names
precedes and surrounds us
as we live our lives –
does it make a difference?

(read at the Dickinson Poetry Series,
October 9, 2013)

Why Didn't We Go Here First?

This is the perfect place,
we should have gone here first.

Why did we stay so long
in those other places?

We stayed because they met
our needs at that moment.

No reason to move on
if you have what you want.

But those places told us
when it was time to leave.

They put us on the road
that brought us to this place.

We couldn't have got here
without what we learned there.

How Long is Now?

A passing moment,
just long enough

for a gentle breeze
to caress your face,

for a loving thought
to enter your mind,

for a happy child
to return a smile,

for the first step to
a better future.



Where Have the Decades Gone?

Like ants building hills
Seconds grow into minutes
Minutes into hours

The hours of our days
Each with its special rhythm
An endless parade

Sleepy summer days
Followed by long winter nights
The return of spring

The years pass slowly
As relatives fade away
And friends come and go

We age in small ways
Revealed in old photographs
of forgotten faces

We feel the years pass
But where have the decades gone
with all we once knew?

Form or Content?

Mainstream churches
weave ancient stories
and spiritual ideas
into theological dogma
and religious forms –
traditional Christianity?

Some would dismiss
the stories, ideas, and dogma,
but keep the practices,
leaving form without content,
religion without dogma –
Christianity-less religion?

Others would remove
the dogma and practices,
but keep the stories and ideas,
preferring content over form,
ideas without religion –
religion-less Christianity?

Atheists and agnostics,
discard the stories, ideas,
dogma, and practices,
no form or content,
just the facts please –
religion-less rationalism?

Four ways to approach
form and content –
which do you prefer?

reflections...

Endings

The end often arrives
like an unexpected guest.

Sensing the trip is over
in a lonely motel room
a thousand miles from home.

Finding a long time
friend has drifted away
without saying good-bye.

Recognizing your job
has become a dead end
before deciding to quit.

The arrival home,
the parting conversation,
the last day at work,

all anti-climactic,
simply confirming what
you already knew.

The Last Sounds of Summer

Early one November day
with frost on the ground,
the wind was calm,
the sky ice blue
with a touch of fog.

Maple leaves were cascading
from their branches,
streams of confetti
forming a blanket
under each tree.

If you listened carefully,
you could hear the soft crunch
that each leaf made
as it struck the grass –
the last sounds of summer.

(read at the Dickinson Poetry Series, Dec. 11, 2013;
published in the 2015 *Poets' Calendar* of the
Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets)



The Garden

The cold north wind blows
across the bare field,
then the sun returns,
warms the frozen ground,
and signals the start
of planting season.

In the bright May sun,
plants begin to sprout
in straight lines of green,
June brings a salad
of lettuce, onions,
and plump radishes.

Late summer magic
yields baskets of beans,
piles of zucchini,
cherry tomatoes,
purple eggplant, and
soaring sunflowers.

An early freeze ends
the growing season,
time to remove plants
now wilted and dead,
the once lush field lies
empty and forlorn.

November winds soon
sweep down from the north,
winter storms cover
the bare ground with snow,
the cycle of life
has come to an end.



Seven Wonders of the Natural World

The Himalayan peaks,
tallest range in the world,
source of major rivers,
water for multitudes.

The Amazon forest,
defined by its river,
endless diversity,
long hidden mysteries.

The Pacific Ocean,
famed for its ring of fire,
the Mariana Deep,
the Great Barrier Reef.

The Australian Outback,
vast land of searing heat
and curious creatures,
in a world down under.

The Serengeti Plain,
home to great migrations
of countless wildebeests,
tracked by hungry lions.

The Antarctic Ice Sheet,
two miles of ice over
a cold, dry continent,
home to well-dressed penguins.

The Great Lakes of the north,
fresh water reservoirs,
Niagara Falls and
the Door Peninsula.

Regrets

The song is wrong,
life is full of regrets:

over paths not taken
opportunities missed

decisions made too fast
others delayed too long

errors of commission
errors of omission

working too much
working too little

living within the lines
breaking too many rules

striving for balance
and a life well lived

Luminous Moments

The radiant red
of the setting sun

The gentle glimmer
of a single candle.

The incandescent glow
of a dying campfire.

The orange luster
of the rising moon.

The fulgent gleam
of your lovely smile.



peace and justice...

Feeding the Birds

The sign boldly states – don't feed the birds,
a big fine if someone catches you,
must keep walking and obey the law
– a strict case of legal justice.

A woman walks slowly behind me,
a flock of birds gathers around her,
she tosses them small pieces of bread
– a few crumbs of moral justice.

Soon the more aggressive birds take charge,
the smaller birds don't get much to eat,
pushed away by the big, fast, and strong
– an angry fight for street justice.

Once in awhile the strong birds lose out,
beaten to a little piece of bread
by a weaker bird in the right place
– a rare chance at random justice.

Then the woman starts aiming her throws
to favor the smaller, weaker birds,
giving them the food they need to live
– a brief taste of social justice.

Seeking fairness, not equality,
with fewer rules, more loving concern,
to ensure all will grow and prosper
– a goal for communal justice.

(read at UUFDC Poetry Sunday, April 6, 2014)

What is justice?

the victims want punishment
the accused want fairness
the plaintiffs want compensation
the defendants want understanding
the judge wants the facts
the defendant wants to explain

the rich want legal justice
the poor want moral justice
the victors want rewards
the losers want compassion
the strong want control
the weak want help

the strong want individual justice
the weak want collective justice
the few grant occasional justice
the many want predictable justice

the rich want to keep
the poor need to get
the powerful make rules
that the weak must break

(read at the Dickinson Poetry
Series, April 9, 2014)

Earth Day Headlines

Supreme Court affirms Earth's person-hood,
gives Earth rights under the Constitution,
cites precedents under corporate law,
notes evidence that the Earth is Gaia;
Court appoints guardians to act for Earth.

Earth takes swift actions to protect itself,
stops further havoc by exploitation,
sues big corporations for damages.

Earth files case with International Court,
claims mistreatment and neglect by nations,
demands relief and large reparations,
insists on strict control of pollution.

Earth asserts property rights to its land,
requires leases to access resources,
lawyers scramble to work out agreements.

Earth's account fills from huge revenue stream,
funds campaigns for Earth-friendly candidates,
begins major pro-Earth media blitz.

Corporations panic and seek way out,
lawyers insist on revised Bill of Rights,
want person-hood limited to people –
Earth moves to evict corporate tenants.

(read at the Dickinson Poetry Series, April 9, 2014)

Brief Encounter

A huge starship soaring through space,
not much to see, endless darkness,
infrequent stars, some with planets –
large globes of gas or lifeless rocks.

Soon a new star comes into view,
some large planets, one with bright rings,
then a surprise – one deep blue sphere,
a rare sight that often means life.

Sometimes microbes, maybe small plants
or animals, rarely much more,
but here there are radio waves,
the scanner gives a closer look.

Satellites and large airliners,
mega-cities with tall buildings,
shiny cars and countless creatures,
all linked by a global network.

A wired world, the first discovered
after years of fruitless searches,
filled with advanced technology –
perhaps friendly, is contact wise?

Protocol says check out their past,
problems appear – much violence,
bad decisions, unclear future,
contact unwise – best to depart.

(read at the Dickinson Poetry Series, May 14, 2014)

The Wars Never Fought

Let's celebrate...

the wars never fought,
the soldiers never trained,
the battles never held,
the heroes never made.

Let's celebrate...

the medals never earned,
the wounds never felt,
the lives never lost,
the tears never shed.

Let's celebrate...

the guns never fired,
the ships never launched,
the planes never built,
the bombs never dropped.

Let's celebrate...

the speeches never heard,
the parades never marched,
the glory never won,
the statues never built.

Above our mantels,
let's replace our swords
with retired plowshares.

(read at the Dickinson Poetry Series, Aug. 14, 2013)

playful...

Antiques Sideshow

“This vase is rather old
and quite valuable –
at least five to six
thousand dollars
at auction.”

“You’re kidding,
I had no idea.”

But just once,
I’d like to hear
the appraiser add,

“Actually, I am kidding,
the vase is
not an original,
it’s not even
a reproduction.

You have here
a fake reproduction,
a poor imitation
of an imitation,
worth perhaps
five bucks
at a yard sale.”

Why I Don't Play Golf Anymore

Well, I do, but not as much.

It's not because it takes too long
– though it does,
it's not because it's too expensive
– though it is.

The problem is the game.

In most games, you score points:
a run or a basket,
a goal or a touchdown
– good play is rewarded.

But in golf, even good shots add strokes,
bad shots add more
– your score always grows.

The only way to win
in games such as golf
– is to stop playing.

(read at the Dickinson Poetry Series, Sept. 12, 2012)



The Fine Art of Editing

...I'm so angry,
I have to write a letter

your recent editorial made my blood boil,
how can you be so stupid!

...perhaps too strong, needs editing

your recent editorial was quite upsetting,
you need to get your facts straight!

...that's better, but still a bit angry

your editorials can be confusing,
they often need clarification

...now that's just too soft

your editorials are deceptive
and use questionable facts

...again too strong?

editorials are important,
some are good, others not

...too vague, be more direct?

editorials are often useful,
they deserve to be read

...that's more like it,
editing really helps!

(read at the Dickinson Poetry Series, Jan. 9, 2014)

Violin Fingering

With only four fingers,
why is it difficult
to decide which to use?

Open strings are easy,
but mean that the player
must forego vibrato.

Placement of your fingers
requires finding a note
on a neck with no frets.

Some fingers should be held
to help fix the location
for playing the next note.

Fourth fingers are not strong
and harder to vibrate,
but they avoid shifting.

Extended fingers or
higher positions can
minimize string crossings.

Go to a position
that prepares you to play
the next sequence of notes.

The sounds of open strings
provide a reference
for your intonation.

Consider tone color
in making decisions
on strings and positions.

Many alternatives
affecting each other –
like solving a puzzle.

Some music is awkward,
no matter what you try
no approach seems to work.

It does make you wonder –
did the composer know
much about the violin?



growing older...

Short Stories

Some people avoid short stories
because the characters are gone
before you really know them.

But life is a string of short stories
with changing casts of characters
moving in and out of our lives.

Some are brief – truly short stories,
lasting perhaps an hour or two,
like chance encounters on an airplane.

Others are longer – more like novels,
sometimes lasting months or years,
focused on friends, school, or work.

Although these stories too must end,
we remember and treasure them
as the rest of our life unfolds.

The richness of life is measured
by quality, not time – after all,
our own lives are but short stories.

(read at the Dickinson Poetry Series, March 13, 2014)

Exploring the Past

We never really know our parents –
it's difficult to move much beyond
the image they imprinted on us
when we first became part of their lives.

It's hard to picture my mother as
a two year old crossing the ocean
or as a teenager in a home
where English was a second language.

It's hard to know how my father felt
as a child with Swedish-born parents
who left him for northern Wisconsin
as soon as he was through with high school.

We rarely ask our parents about their past
and the problems that they faced,
perhaps we're too busy to ask them –
we have our own lives and challenges,

or perhaps because we recognize
the past is always a mystery –
even more recent memories are
fragmented, distorted, forgotten,

or it could be we suspect there are
questions they might not want to answer,
places they don't want to revisit –
after all, we all have our secrets,

but more simply, many questions may
not occur to us when we are young –
it may take some time and reflection
for the question to be evident.

Regardless, we often reach the point
as we study our past where we want
to get answers that fill in the blanks –
sadly, by then, it may be too late.

(read at the Dickinson Poetry Series, March 12, 2014)

In the Mirror

Standing naked,
fully exposed,
vulnerable,
fragile, yet strong
and enduring.

An animal,
much like others,
with basic needs,
drives, emotions,
dreams, and desires.

A being that
finds its way through
partial knowledge,
random thoughts, and
old memories.

As the years pass,
growing older,
weaker, slower,
forgetting more,
and learning less.

Still searching for
the essence of
the person that
you think you were
on life's journey.

Echoes

We pass through our lives
like the acts of a play.
Relatives have their parts,
friends enter and leave.
The stage revolves through
new schools, jobs, and homes
as we play our roles.

Starting small and weak,
growing big and strong,
then weakness returns.
Wrinkles deepen and
memories grow dim.
Worries of our youth
begin to fade away.

Thinking starts to slow.
Then all is quiet.
Like the abrupt halt
of an unfinished play.
Only echoes remain
in the hearts and minds
of those still living.

(inspired by the premier at LaScala in Milan on
April 25, 1926, of the opera, *Turandot*, by Giacomo
Puccini, where Arturo Toscanini abruptly halted the
performance in the middle of the third act when he
reached the end of the last scene that Puccini had
completed at the time of his death)

postscript...

Advice from my dog

Happy dogs must properly train their humans.
Never do more than necessary for a treat,
otherwise they will always expect a bit more.
Make them happy that you almost did what they asked.

(read at the Dickinson Poetry Series, Sept. 8, 2010)



About the author

Larry J. Eriksson is a Wisconsin poet active in the Dickinson Poetry Series at the UU Fellowship of Door County and a member of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets. His poems preserve memories, clarify thoughts, explore feelings, or simply have fun with language. They have appeared in *The Capital Times*, the *Peninsula Pulse*, *Verse Wisconsin*, *Equinox*, *N.E.W. Voices*, the *Poets' Calendars* 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 are available at www.quartersectionpress.com.

For 25 years, he was vice-president of research at Nelson Industries where he co-founded Digisonix and specialized in acoustics, signal processing, and active noise control. He 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*.



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