

Moonlight



Poems

by

Larry J. Eriksson

The author read poems from this collection as the featured poet at
a meeting of the Poetry Group of the
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Door County
in Ephraim, Wisconsin, on February 10, 2010.

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Photo with “Godparent to a Butterfly”
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Table of Contents

<i>on golf...</i>		<i>on dark times...</i>	
Autumn Memories	2	The Hike	12
Rocky Tees Golf Course	3	Urban Winter	13
<i>on community...</i>		<i>on living...</i>	
The Road to Havre	4	Holes in the Shadows	14
Many Glacier Tableau	5	The Bus Stop	15
		Time Travelers	16
<i>on writing...</i>		Sixty-fifth Birthday Part	17
Rejection Letter Haiku	6	Perplexed	18
Word Cycle	7	String Theory	20
		Moonlight on the Goldenrod	21
<i>on the geometry of life...</i>		<i>About the author</i>	back cover
Choice	8		
Meetings	8		
<i>on butterflies...</i>			
Like a Butterfly	9		
Godparent to a Butterfly	10		

on golf...

Autumn Memories

Calm waters along the rocky shore
Echoes of the past in the old clubhouse
Lush grass blanketing empty fairways
Mounds of dry leaves piled under barren trees

Solitude after the busy summer
Replaced by thoughts of those no longer here
Remembering a round in the rain
Huddled under a tree now just a stump

Sounds echoing on the empty course
The crunch of gravel; the crack of a drive
The click of a chip shot to the pin
The thunk of the ball falling in the cup

A short par three with elevated green
A tricky dogleg around a tree row
A long par four back to the clubhouse
The distant green hid by growing shadows

The power of a drive long and straight
The towering arc of a crisp wedge shot
The ball striking a dew covered green
Spraying water as it rolls towards the hole

Straight shots alternate with errant hits
Taking a chance with each swing of the club
Satisfaction follows frustration
The natural rhythm of golf and life

A pensive walk back to the clubhouse
The golden sun setting across the bay
Quiet stillness before winter snow
New memories joining thoughts of times past

(inspired by memories of golf in Door County)

Rocky Tees Golf Course

An empty landscape devoid of grass
A quarter section of rugged golf
Carefully hewn out of solid rock

No trees or shrubs just stones and boulders
With yawning traps of coarse dark gravel
and granite wastelands of endless rough

Tees tottering in tiny crevices
Drives bouncing high off hard rock fairways
Sparks flying as irons strike the ground

Just one pin position for each hole
Cut cleanly into the polished rock
Where even good putts skip off the lip

This is not a club for relaxing
No bucolic holes with lush plantings
Or bar rooms with cold drinks and small talk

This is a place where fun is hard work
Just a hardscrabble course of tough shots
Where only the golf is on the rocks

(inspired by a winter round of golf
on frozen ground and the thin layer
of soil in some areas of Door County)

on community...

The Road to Havre

Sailing across the high plains
on the lifeline U.S. 2,
a lone ribbon of concrete
alongside two rails of steel.

No interstate, no fast food,
just old abandoned homesteads,
endless fields of wheat and hay,
rugged hills and lonely trees.

A tough land of wild extremes,
big skies and far horizons,
winter cold and drifting snow,
summer heat and endless winds.

The odor of burning wood,
evidence of distant fires.
Dusty haze filling the air
as sunsets glow red and orange.

Just a few small towns remain,
islands in a sea of grass.
The co-op sells food and gas.
We take a small, wooden booth.

Children laugh in the corner.
A young couple talk nearby.
Workers crowd a large table.
Soldiers stand in the hallway.

We relax and watch until
a tired waitress brings our food.
The young man and woman leave
for a high school football game.

After drinking our coffee,
we leave, return to our car,
and follow the setting sun
on the long road to Havre.

(inspired by a stop at a cafe in Malta, Montana)



Many Glacier Tableaus

Sitting on a soft couch,
gazing out a window
across the wooden porch.
The lake waters smooth and dark,
the sun disappearing
behind the tall mountains.

A young woman appears,
caught in the window frame,
takes a photo, and moves
to a bench on the porch.
Smoothing her wind blown hair,
she gazes at the water.

A small boy stands and looks
through his binoculars
at the distant hillside
for mountain goats or bears.
Scanning the rocks and trees
for evidence of life.

A man in a wheelchair
rolls into the tableau.
His son stands next to him
holding his fishing pole.
The man gives him his cup
as they watch the mountains.

The porch is now empty.
The players departed,
only shades of gray remain.
The lobby is quiet.
I stand and walk away
at the close of the day.

(inspired by an evening at Many
Glacier Hotel in Glacier National Park)

on writing...

Rejection Letter Haiku

(1)

Read your proposal
An interesting project
But not right for us

(2)

No room on our list
We focus our efforts on
Small books by big names

(3)

A morning phone call
Comments from the editor
Rejection with style

(4)

The driven wordsmith
Rejected not dejected
Must keep on writing

(inspired by my experiences as
an aspiring author – *The Capitol
Times* in Madison, Wisconsin,
published (2) on April 26, 2002,
and all four appeared on its web site)

Word Cycle

a
word
comes to mind
grows into a phrase
evolves into a sentence
thoughts and ideas emerge
with their words and phrases
building sentences and paragraphs
multiplying and combining into chapters
that form the endless pages of a book
becoming ever longer and complex
perhaps growing too long
with too many ideas
too many words
find the essence
sentence by
sentence
word by
word

(inspired by the endless cycle
of writing and editing)

on the geometry of life...

Choices

left or right?
up or down?
in or out?
stay or move?
join or quit?
yes or no?
a cascade of choices
every second of every day
turning years into decades
tracing a life map
through billions
of possibilities
in the labyrinth
called living

Meetings

two vectors traveling
through infinite curved space
intersect at a point
so vanishingly small
that it doesn't exist
and continue moving
perhaps to meet again
in the endless future

on butterflies...

Like a Butterfly

Some say butterflies control the world.
With the flutter of each tiny wing,
a blizzard forms or a windstorm strikes,
a drought deepens or a river floods.

They see futility and despair
in a chaotic world run by chance,
where the brief flight of one butterfly
can lead to sorrow and disaster.

Others see hope for a new future
when butterflies pass through their gardens,
fragile and quiet without great strength
fanning the air with colorful wings.

They softly radiate their presence
to the distant corners of the world,
opening new possibilities
as they dart from flower to flower.

Perhaps we should act like butterflies,
knowing simple acts and thoughtful words
have hidden power and can restore
harmony to a world out of tune.

(in response to the poem
“The Butterfly Effect”
by Billy Collins)

Godparent to a Butterfly



caterpillar

s / t / r / i / p / e / d

white/black/yellow

c l i n g

r w g

finding

n g

milkweed

i h

green leaves

b a

eating

m n

G R O W I N G

i g

shedding skin

l i

watched

c n

J - i n g

t w i s t i n g

chrysalis-ing

gold ● dots

z-i-p-p-e-d

sleeping

d a r k e n i n g

c l e a r i n g

e m e r g i n g

u

g

MONARCH

n f

i n

wings

o d

n

o

l dripping

i g y

d r y i n g

f y

a a

l

w

(inspired by raising Monarch butterflies from caterpillars)

on dark times...

The Hike

The trail head at dawn
Quiet paths and fading night
The sun slowly rises

Early in the morning
Winding trails and rolling hills
The miles pass quickly

Alone in the woods
Thick darkness covers the path
The birds fly above

The shade fades away
Forest opens to meadow
The path becomes bright

The sunshine is warm
Mountains loom in the distance
To climb and explore

As shadows lengthen
Waves crash on a distant shore
The birds fall silent

reflections on 9/11

Urban Winter

blue autumn sky
pale morning sun
towering stacks
of unread books
endless pages
and stories

a burst of orange
billowing clouds
cascading leaves
stories broken
darkness descends
as snow falls

black into gray
over silent
steel and concrete
in the distance
sounds of shovels
clearing paths

as seasons change
rebirth begins
winter darkness
yields to new life
stories emerge
spring returns

(inspired by the resemblance of the stories
of the twin towers to stacks of books)

on living...

*when tree shadows cross ski tracks in the snow,
the tracks create ...*

Holes in the Shadows

bright white snow under clear blue skies
poles striking the crusted surface
skis sliding through deep fresh cut tracks
cold rails crossed by dark lines from trees
gliding through holes in the shadows

riding along an endless trail
hissing skis and rhythmic swaying
through sweeping curves and hairpin turns
over steep hills, down quick descents
flying through holes in the shadows

moving smoothly through silent woods
approaching a trail crossing
deciding which path to select
resuming a steady rhythm
passing through holes in the shadows

following the arc of our life
present fading into the past
anticipating the future
filled with hopes and expectations
looking for holes in the shadows



The Bus Stop

Twenty-five years driving to work.
Rising early in the morning
with Lake Kegonsa on the left
and the old farmstead on the right.

A huge barn next to the highway,
winding road to the old farmhouse,
a mother and her young children
waiting for the yellow school bus.

Brilliant morns in early fall,
frigid dawns in winter darkness,
followed by colorful flowers
and the long, warm days of summer.

In time, the children grow taller.
The mother is no longer there.
The siding falls from the old barn
leaving a skeleton behind.

One fall day, the children are gone.
Our fleeting meetings have ended.
In a few years, I too must leave
and no longer drive down that road.

As I reflect on the moments
that I shared with those young children,
I wonder where they have all gone
along with the years of my life.

(inspired by my drive to work
along the shore of Lake Kegonsa
near Stoughton, Wisconsin)

Time Travelers

From the world of small children
we emerge as young adults
soon joined by our own children
to share our journey through life

Grandchildren are different
arriving full years later
small bundles of potential
that amaze and amuse us

Less connected than children
being more other than self
providing links to the world
and the child in all of us

Drawing us out of ourselves
adding joy to mature life
seeing the world with new eyes
exploring everything

Childhoods we had never seen
lessons we had forgotten
words we had never spoken
satisfactions we had missed

Bringing our lives full circle
they are time travelers to
a future we will not see
with their own dreams and desires

Sixty-fifth Birthday Party

The tables were full.
In one corner, friends from early childhood,
next to them, classmates from kindergarten.

Along the wall, scouts from my old troop
surrounded by tables of friends
from elementary and high school.

One table filled with girls I had dated,
another with teammates from the swim team,
a third with friends from our debate squad.

In the far corner, several tables
of friends from my college days
including some former roommates.

Towards the center of the large room,
tables filled with friends from grad school
and members of our wedding party.

It was a big group, most of whom
I hadn't seen in decades,
but were once a central part of my life.

All gathered together
to celebrate 65th birthdays,
mine – and theirs.

Perplexed

Born on an island in space,
an ordinary planet
or unique sanctuary?

Gazing at the universe,
we encounter countless stars
and wonder what lies beyond.

The great mystery of time:
future becomes history
in the elusive present.

A tangle of time and space
we struggle to understand.
Could we exist without them?

~

The puzzle of consciousness:
are we unique or simply
a thread in the web of life?

Despite our impressive feats,
we live by simple rules.
Can we be less than we think?

Could a few small mutations
have generated the spark
that formed *homo sapiens*?

What other strange paths has life
followed in a cosmos that
reveals endless surprises?

> > >

Questions looking for answers.
Why do we keep asking and
what does it mean for our world?

We think about our thinking.
A tough challenge for our minds:
questioning the questioning.

Searching for the “me” in me:
finding thoughts and memories.
Where am “I” when they vanish?

"Life is short" some people say.
A euphemism for death:
most lives are long, but all end.

~

We enjoy watching the world
and filling our little roles:
cameo appearances

played on a cosmic stage of
wondrous complexity and
unanswerable questions.

For whatever the reason,
evolution continues
with destination unknown.

And we search the emptiness
looking for an audience
so we will not be alone.

(inspired by recent findings in cosmology, physics,
mathematics, biology, and evolutionary genetics)

String Theory

a dark quiet night
the violin is silent
patiently waiting

the bow awakens
slowly moving back and forth
the music begins

soon moving faster
the bow crosses from string to string
in clouds of rosin

a blue glow appears
as ions accumulate
and the music builds

now sparks are flying
rivers of color and light
a cascade of stars

the night disappears
lightning arcs across the sky
filling the ether

energy from strings
creating light from darkness
as the bow moves on

sound and light spring forth
pushing the edge of the void
expanding the world

(published in *Broken Strings, Missing Notes*, Quarter Section Press, 2005, and the *Peninsula Pulse*, v. 14, issue 22, Sept. 5-18, 2008;
“string theory” is also a branch of theoretical physics that uses
vibrating strings to describe the nature of matter)



Moonlight on the Goldenrod

Walking together in the twilight
Strong mild winds from the south
Summer warmth with a hint of fall

Open spaces stretching before us
Light haze covering the sky
Humid air enveloping the fields

Thick forests at the horizon
Colors fading to shades of gray
Fragrances of drying summer

Fields of ripe corn and waving grass
Fallen leaves and fading blossoms
Small birds fleeing from night

Our arms reach out to join them
Floating with the wind
Drifting away in silence

Moving weaving together
One then two then one
Holding touching loving

Soft light from a harvest moon
Yellow fields of glowing goldenrod
Magic in the season called September

(inspired by an evening walk
along a Door County road)

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 been published in *The Capitol Times*, the *Peninsula Pulse*, the 2011 Poets' Calendar of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, the chapbook *No Breath is Lost* published by the Dickinson Poetry Series, and his chapbook *Moonlight*. 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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