

Moving



Poems

by

Larry J. Eriksson

Selected publications by Larry J. Eriksson

Poetry chapbooks

Moonlight (2010)

Moments (2011)

Mysteries (2011)

MindGames (2012)

Marching (2013)

Memories (2013)

MoodSwings (2014)

Selected Poems (2014)

Moving (2015)

Nonfiction books

Business Decisions (2002)

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on moving...

A New Friend

The toddler staggers down the walk
under a dazzling summer sun
using his newly acquired skill –
then he notices his shadow.

Frightened by this strange intruder,
he cries and tries to run away,
but no matter where he stumbles,
his shadow sticks tightly to him.

It hides when he turns around,
but reappears when he turns back;
his parents tell him to relax
and enjoy his new visitor.

And much like the frightened toddler,
we need to accept the shadows
that often accompany us
as we walk the paths of our lives.

Riding the Rails

A nonstop train ride in coach,
Milwaukee to Miami,
to attend a 2 convention
with youth from across the nation.

In the middle of the night
somewhere in Indiana,
students talk, play cards, read, sleep
as the train rolls down the track.

At the end of the long train,
a small group gathers to watch
the rails fade into the past
as they race into the future.



The Tool Shop

Awake with the rising Sun,
dress, eat fast, off to the shop,
an aging well-worn building,
concrete block walls, few windows,
met by the pungent odors
of oil, metal, and machines,
must punch in at the time clock,
at seven, the work begins.

Harsh noises, lurking dangers,
showers of machine shavings,
flashing razor sharp metal,
hazardous carcinogens,
thuds from pounding punch presses,
hard and often boring work,
endless sweeping and cleaning,
finally it's time for lunch.

The big machines go silent,
workers sit at their benches,
open metal lunch boxes,
eat a baloney sandwich
and read the morning paper,
a few listen to the news
or discuss last night's ball game,
all too soon, it's back to work.

Then the highlight of my day,
driving the old pick-up truck
cross town to a customer,
a chance to briefly escape
the dull routine of the shop,
a welcome breath of fresh air,
had done it a hundred times –
but this time, I would not return.

Self Service, ca. 1970

The Interstate is deserted
late on a Sunday afternoon,
urgent that I reach Buffalo
for an early morning meeting,
suddenly, a red light comes on –
the radiator is leaking,
must stop to protect the engine,
then an exit comes into view.

A bleak, desolate interchange
lost in the middle of nowhere,
no food, no motel, no service,
just some gas, could arrange a tow,
but no repairs until morning,
I walk over the Interstate
to another dingy station,
no repairs, but they sell stop leak.

I crimp the punctured metal vane
tightly with my locking pliers,
the hole shrinks to a narrow crack,
add water, a can of stop leak,
start the engine, hope for the best –
the leak slows, stops, at least for now,
frustration turns to elation,
back on the road, counting the miles.

Backstage

Taking a road trip,
seeing the world
through a car window,
rolling farmland
and attractive towns,
big welcome signs
with state champions
and service clubs,
all dressed up and
framed by flowers.

Stopping for the night
at a tidy motel
with inviting rooms,
everything looks
pretty much perfect,
but then I pause
at the small window
in the rear bathroom –
searching for what is
out-of-sight, backstage.

Driving to Door

The geese are flying south,
but I am going north,
exploring the shoreline
of vast Lake Michigan.

The old car ferry steams
slowly across the lake
trailing a smoky plume,
a relic from the age
of coal and steam power.

Abandoned years ago,
a giant factory
lies empty and broken,
the former center of
a now down-sized city.

A shuttered power plant,
a source of clean power
over many decades,
leaves a risky mountain
of spent nuclear fuel.

A landscape of changes
on the highways of life,
as the geese keep flying
their timeless migrations.

Steel Swallows

From out of the Bay Ship dry dock,
massive bulk carriers were born,
some longer than a battleship,
not ships, but boats, self-unloaders,
long and narrow, designed to move
big loads slowly across the Lakes.

Hard working boats moving ore, coal,
salt and limestone on the Great Lakes –
from Superior, the Soo Locks,
and Michigan, Huron, Erie,
to the cities of Milwaukee,
Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland.

Built for inland seas with strong storms
that can challenge any vessel –
a furious November gale
brought down the Edmond Fitzgerald,
hogging on a towering wave
broke the back of the Carl Bradley.

Returning home for the winter,
steel swallows to Capistrano,
risking the Porte Des Morts Passage
or the Sturgeon Bay ship canal,
finding berths at the Bay Ship piers,
two or three deep – waiting for spring.

(inspired by ore boats built in Sturgeon Bay)

The Antenna Farm

Just a gentle rise,
a surprising place
for the highest point
in the county,
the perfect home for
an antenna farm.

Soaring stalks grown
without chemicals –
fully organic,
some tall and skinny,
others with long ears
to hear cell phone calls.

Spider webs of steel
surround and support
the towering plants;
ruby lightning bugs
softly blink alerts
to passing aircraft.

Yielding an ocean
of broadcast signals,
distant radios
harvest their produce
to give listeners
welcome food for thought.

Magic from a Box

A large Heathkit carton
sits on the floor with scores
of tiny parts waiting
to be a radio.

Little striped resistors,
large round capacitors,
a heavy transformer,
and a box to hold them.

An assembly book with
an endless list of steps
that must be completed
in order – marked when done.

“locate the transformer,”
“attach the toggle switch,”
“connect the yellow wire,”
“solder the striped orange wire.”

Each task checked and rechecked,
step-by-step, page-by-page,
until the end arrives
and the moment of truth.

Plug in the power cord
and give it the smoke test –
then magic, music flows
from what were just loose parts.

Ode to Science Past

Once we were the center
of the universe
sitting high on a turtle,
now we ride a small rock
orbiting a common star.

Phlogiston has vanished
up the chimney,
ether has evaporated
leaving light with
no means of support,
Pluto has fallen
to just another dwarf.

The wall of knowledge
is built one brick at a time,
but sometimes a brick
must be removed
when it no longer fits.

(published in WFOP Museletter,
Summer, 2015)

The Dance of Life

Some events are slow and impressive,
continents' long march across the seas,
mountains' robust climb into the sky,
rivers' mighty flow to the ocean.

Other events are hidden wonders,
in tiny cells, long chains of chromosomes
replicate themselves without error,
form into a line and break apart.

Pulled by proteins, they begin their dance,
twirling into matching sets of genes,
each the heart of a new nucleus
separated into two new cells.

The essential building blocks of life,
our own bodies with trillions of cells,
minute cells each with billions of base pairs,
forged in a biochemical dance.

Choreography shaped through eons,
used by all creatures, now on the edge,
facing threats from deadly viruses,
toxic chemicals, and climate change.

Our lonely, blue planet moves through space
with a biosphere infused with life –
uncommon, perhaps unique, needing care
so the wondrous dance can continue.

on politics...

Vietnam Redux

Out of a whirlwind
of endless dark clouds,
a hungry draft comes
to consume young men
anxiously waiting
for their call to war.

Mocking long-held plans
for study and work,
unwanted letters
deliver cold and
unyielding commands
to join the army.

Random lives chosen
to serve the nation
without regard to
their value except
to meet the demands
of the war machine.

Many lives are lost,
countless others are
damaged or disrupted,
they face a future
not of their choosing
burdened by the past.

On Wisconsin?

When Wisconsin's leaders
attack the rights of women,
neglect the needs of our children,
destroy the power of workers,
ridicule the protesters,
reward the rich and powerful –
where is the moral outrage?

When Wisconsin's leaders
diminish democracy,
restrict government,
trivialize education,
disdain the views of experts,
mock its great university –
where is the moral outrage?

When Wisconsin's leaders
ignore the majority,
tune out the opposition,
respond to money,
pander to power,
impose their will –
where is the moral outrage?

>>>

>>>

When Wisconsin's leaders
forget the ancient sermon,
blessed are the poor,
blessed are the meek,
blessed are the merciful,
blessed are the peacemakers –
where is the moral outrage?

Where are the leaders
who will rebuild Wisconsin,
our country's progressive leader,
the home of the "Wisconsin Idea,"
the "laboratory for democracy,"
the state of Bob La Follette –
who has the moral outrage?



Beach Lessons

The bright morning Sun
burns through a light fog
along the wild Gulf.

Powerful swells break
fiercely on the beach,
red flags are flying.

Surfers wait offshore
hoping for a ride
on the perfect wave.

Incoming waves break
up the sloping beach,
where a surfer stands.

As the wave recedes,
he hops on his board,
slides down the wet sand.

It was a short ride,
but sometimes you can
surf into the waves.

on living...

Yin and Yang

What is best...

parents who have answers
or parents who ask questions?

teachers who pull you up
or teachers who push you up?

the spouse of your dreams
or a spouse with new dreams?

children following your footsteps
or children taking new paths?

jobs using your talents
or jobs teaching new skills?

a life in which you do well
or a life in which you do good?

A Tale of Two Numbers

Three...

a prime number, stable,
resistant to change,
three-sided triangles
build strong bridges
and tall buildings;
found in the dialectic,
thesis, antithesis, synthesis;
in Trinitarian theology,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
in Christian teachings,
law, sin, grace;
closed, complete.

Four...

trapped between primes,
a power of two, unstable,
four-legged chairs rock,
four-piece structures
fold and collapse;
found in the seasons,
summer, fall, winter, spring;
in the ancient elements,
water, air, fire, earth;
in the fourth wall
of a theater stage;
open, incomplete.

To Be Twelve Again

The magical age of twelve,
the pivot point found between
childhood and maturity.

Still immersed in the stories
and mysteries of children,
while beginning to enter
the fact-filled world of adults.

Often not making a choice,
but simply accepting both
as two sides of the same coin.

Magically combining
images, myths, and stories
with facts, knowledge, and logic
into an alluring view
that will slowly fade away.

Garage Treasures

A painting printed on canvas
hanging on our garage wall,
a gift from a savings bank,
decor for our first apartment.

A wagon with silver wheels
that took our kids to parades,
since repainted to carry
another generation.

Cross country skis and bindings
used on snowy winter days;
sleds with shiny steel runners
for flying down icy hills.

Rugged tools from grandparents,
strong steel and wood – no plastic,
practical inherited gifts
for shoveling snow and dirt.

An eclectic collection
embedded with memories,
fading shadows of the past
connecting generations.

The Siren Call of Freedom

Frustrated young children,
impatient teenagers,
adults looking for work,
couples raising their kids.

All looking for freedom
from the rigid constraints
that control their actions,
wanting to live as they wish.

The years fly by quickly,
children become adults,
grandchildren grow older,
soon retirement arrives.

Perhaps a few concerns
over health and money,
but the freedom is real,
filled with open questions.

Where to live, what to do –
far too many options,
confusion emerges
in the search for answers.

Social Media

It's hard to stay current
with social media,
new sites proliferate
and old sites keep changing
the way they look and work.

I have a Facebook page
to enjoy photos by
grandchildren and others,
but the count of my friends
is hundreds less than theirs.

After I created
a profile on LinkedIn,
it contained far more words
on what I used to be,
than on what I am now.

LinkedIn is designed to
connect you with others,
but when I tried to make
my first connection,
it turned me down cold –

...I need help.

Bewildered
...or a stranger in my native land

My grandparents always seemed a bit bewildered, during their lives, the world had changed in many ways – it had become a new world, where change is frantic.

Years ago, handwritten thank-you notes were common, this gave way to phone calls and later just emails – in our era, no response is necessary.

Courting started with a visit in the parlor, then chaperoned parties and a formal wedding – now Internet dating and a shared apartment.

Workers used to work at one or two companies – today multiple jobs and careers are the rule, often at the same time, while still going to school.

It was a cash world, fewer checks, no credit cards – now cards are pervasive, smart phones make payments, direct deposits, on-line payments, not much cash.

I used to think my grandparents were bewildered because they had immigrated from foreign lands, perhaps not – I'm older now and bewildered too.

The End of Time

Soft morning light filters
into the quiet room,
a hot cup of coffee
steams in the chilly air,
the sweet sound of music
begins to fill the space.

Visions of the past mix
with thoughts of the future,
well-worn books line the shelves –
memories of times past,
familiar dreams persist –
unopened flower buds.

The past never returns,
the future remains distant,
past, present, and future
fused together so that
time comes to an end
and lasts forever.

on writing and reading...

Light Music

A treble clef statue
of polished green glass,
infused by sunshine
from a clear blue sky

makes the room sparkle with
the music of light,
shimmering notes
performed pizzicato,

accompanied by
the spectral colors
of small rainbows formed
by its prismatic base.

(inspired by the room where I often write;
published in the WFOP 2016 Poets' Calendar)



Read a Great Book Lately?

The Vanishing Reader

Published author,
best selling book,
won the Pulitzer,
awarded the Nobel.

Recognitions
abound for authors,
but what about
their readers?

Readers are ignored,
they pay their money
and get their book –
perhaps it's signed.

No wonder so few
take time to read,
instead everyone
writes, blogs, and tweets.

But authors need readers
to respond to their work,
and readers need authors
to enrich their lives.

...write if you must,
but don't forget to read.

Reading moves from
printed books to
audio books
and then e-readers,
from emails to
text messages
or petite tweets.

Do we have time
or space for big books?
or for great books?

How many read
The Odyssey,
War and Peace,
or Moby-Dick?

Or Nobel Prize
winning authors?
like Camus, Grass,
or Saramago?
Or Pulitzer winners
like Massie, Updike,
Dillard, or Rhodes?

Too many words,
too many pages,
too many thoughts,
for the little screens
of our over-filled,
under-nourished,
post-modern lives.

a bit of humor...

In the Dark

Naming colors can be hard,
red and blue are straightforward,
subtle shades of magenta,
violet, and lavender
are often more puzzling.

A host of greens occupy
the complex spectrum between
the cool blues and bright yellows,
including many mixtures
such as chartreuse and turquoise.

Perhaps the most challenging
are pure black and navy blue,
difficult to tell apart
even when placed side by side
and carefully examined.

Part of naval history,
but for modern apparel,
black and navy can seem like
two names for the same color –
just a way to sell more clothes?

Today, naval books report
“navy blue is a tone of black,”
many naval uniforms
are now “black,” not “navy blue” –
no wonder we are confused!

The Old Course

No one recalls when golfers
first played on the old course;
it began as a pasture,
just a few kids hitting balls
and using the scattered trees
as pins for their iron shots.

Over the years, play increased
and a nine hole course emerged,
greens were mowed in the fairways
and marked by a line of paint,
deep burrows dug by varmints
swallowed drives without a trace.

Later, a back nine was built;
with only limited space,
large double greens enabled
the last six holes to be played
three out and three back as they
are at ancient St. Andrew's.

It's an eccentric layout
without a fancy clubhouse,
just a slotted metal pole
to deposit your greens fees,
a round rack to place your ball
and claim your spot on the tee.

The fairways are rough and mean,
the rough is ragged and wild,
there is no advertising,
but if there was, it might say
"if you can play golf here,
you can play golf anywhere."

postscript...

Appendectomy

An author's lament
over a section
that is causing grief,
the words just don't fit,
need a transition
or some editing,
nothing seems to work.

Leftover vestige
from an early draft –
verbal appendix,
might not be needed,
best to remove it
before it causes
any more problems.

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. He sees the world as filled with the music of poetry – a cosmic mystery driven by rhythms, rhymes, and riddles. His poems preserve memories, clarify thoughts, explore feelings, or simply have fun with language. They have appeared in numerous publications and 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 received his B.S.E.E. from Northwestern University, his M.S.E.E. from the University of Minnesota, his Ph.D. in electrical engineering from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and is a Fellow of the Acoustical Society of America and the Society of Automotive Engineers.



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