

Selected publications by Larry J. Eriksson

Poetry chapbooks

Moonlight (2010)

Moments (2011)

Mysteries (2011)

Music (2011; 2nd ed. 2013; 3rd ed. 2016)

MindGames (2012)

Marching (2012; 2nd ed. 2013; 3rd ed. 2016)

Memories (2013)

MoodSwings (2014)

Selected Poems (2014; 2nd ed. 2016)

Moving (2015)

Magic (2016)

Madness (2017)

Musings (2018)

Poetry Collections

Collected Chapbooks (2016)

Word Waves (2016)

Nonfiction books

Business Decisions (2002)

Broken Strings, Missing Notes (2005)

Waves of Silence (2015)

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on books...

A Good Book

You slide into some books
with their opening words,
they grab your interest
and create a new world
that you want to enter.

Strong characters emerge –
some that you grow to love,
some that you soon detest;
disagreements unfold
as the plot twists and turns.

Relationships evolve –
some friends become lovers,
others become rivals,
problems are encountered,
solutions discovered.

In a classic good book,
you don't want to finish,
but the words draw you on,
you think, “how will it end?”
– like the lives that we live.



note: “b-a-r-d-o is a transitional state; e.g. Abraham Lincoln was in the bardo after his son Willy’s death

The Silent “T”

While browsing a local book store,
I looked for a new bestseller –
the book “Lincoln in the Bardo,”
but couldn’t locate a copy.

I went to the reference desk,
and asked the clerk if they had it,
he searched through their computer files
several times without success.

I spelled the title once again
and he finally found the book –
the problem was the silent “T”
he had added to the title.

Although he had made a mistake,
it did suggest a new title
for a very different book –
“Abe Lincoln meets Brigitte Bardot.”



some political poems...

Demagogue

attack everyone
hit fast and hard
keep it short and simple
LOTS OF CAPS
lots of exclamation points!!!
be unpredictable
inconsistent
outrageous
keep moving

devalue democracy
attack institutions
compromise justice
threaten the media
destroy the opposition
ignore the rules
be opaque, lie
keep everyone guessing
create national chaos

upset the world order
disavow treaties
embrace enemies
confront friends
create confusion
encourage fear
threaten attacks
remain bellicose
play golf

*The Enemy of My Enemy**

Some liberals are mad at
James Comey for his actions
before the last election.

Today, Donald Trump poses
an existential threat to
our values, institutions –

but Comey's insightful book,
A Higher Loyalty, speaks
of truth and the rule of law.

An old saying suggests that
perhaps “the enemy of
my enemy is my friend.”

Seen as enemies by Trump,
Comey and the FBI
are friends of the resistance.

Don't think about who did what
when your house is burning down –
take action with all your friends.

* a poem for liberals angry about James
Comey's role in the 2016 election.

The End of Political Discourse

no great debates
no conversations
no discussions
no cooperation
no consensus

fewer newspapers
fewer readers
more sound bites
biased web sites
endless tweets

black and white thinking
no middle ground
no compromises
party-line votes
losers ignored

ignorance and stupidity
lies and misrepresentations
stereotypes and prejudices
name-calling and fighting
hatred and crude language

divisive rhetoric
outrageous claims
endless contradictions
politics as reality show
entertainment “Trumps” ability

political discourse is dying if not dead,
only white hot emotions remain,
devoid of facts, expressing anger,
no search for truth, no respect for law,
grim threats to our democracy

(read at Dickinson Poetry Series,
May 9, 2018)

Democracy Under Siege

Reward the wealthy with big tax cuts,
while the rest see their incomes decline.

Support arms spending and rights to guns,
but cut aid to women and children.

Lavish special care on the well-off,
reduce health care options for the poor.

Enrich private schools for the wealthy,
neglect public schools for the masses.

Suppress unions for private workers,
destroy unions for public workers.

Deceive voters with expensive ads,
weave a web of divisive issues.

Distort reality with a mix
of specious half-truths and outright lies.

Corral opposition votes into
gerrymandered progressive ghettos.

Create new barriers for voting
while limiting freedom to protest.

Freedom of speech is alive and well,
if you have money or connections –

as democracy of the many
evolves into control by the few.

on education...

On Democracy

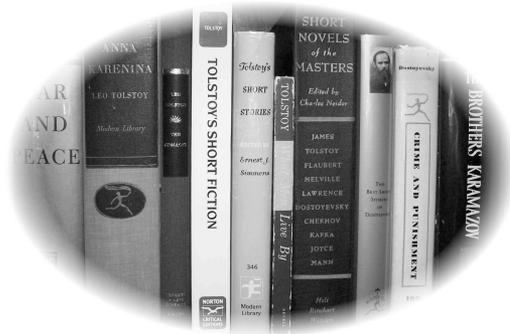
Democracy always sounds good –
“the will of the people, majority rules,”
but most democracies are flawed,
elections are rarely “free and open,”
boundaries are gerrymandered,
representation is unequal,
parties control access and money,
lies and deceptions abound,
the right to vote is often curtailed,
ballot tampering is a concern,
the winning majority too often
ignores the losing minority.

Even in a strong democracy,
voters make misguided decisions –
many voters are poorly informed,
some simply dislike the government
and are suspicious of experts,
others reveal religious bias,
racial bias, or gender bias,
some direct their support and votes
to a single topic of concern
rather than overall competence,
as a result, candidates running
for the greater good may not win.

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What do we really expect from our elected officials? – honest leadership that manages a fair and open government, protects our human and civil rights, adopts effective regulations, provides efficient services; democracy is necessary, but it is not nearly sufficient – our country needs informed voters and civic-minded candidates committed to justice for all.



Crossroads in Education

Short-sighted budget cuts by the state have led the UW-Stevens Point to propose cutting thirteen majors in the liberal arts including majors in English, the arts, history, political science, philosophy, and foreign languages, in favor of technology majors.

A move from education to job training – education teaches critical thinking, training emphasizes following instructions, majors concerned with “how to do things” rather than “what things to do,” emphasizing skills with a short lifespan, rather than education for a lifetime.

Low cost liberal arts majors are cut, while costly tech majors are expanded – an unusual strategy to reduce costs, providing so-called “high-demand career paths” rather than enhancing “high-quality lives,” producing the graduates corporations want, rather than the graduates society needs.

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In his recent book *Leonardo da Vinci*, Walter Isaacson notes that Steve Jobs of Apple saw creativity occurring at the crossroads between the “liberal arts” and “technology,” our society requires an improved balance between training courses and the liberal arts, between short term demands and long range needs.

(letter version of *Crossroads in Education* published in Wisconsin State Journal on-line edition at madison.com, April 2, 2018; print edition, April 3, 2018; earlier letter version published in Cap Times on-line edition at madison.com, Mar. 15, 2018)



Oasis

Epigraph

Fifty years ago on Apollo 8,
as he watched the Earth rise over the Moon,
astronaut Jim Lovell declared that
“the Earth from here is a grand oasis.”

A small probe flying near the speed of light
searches for life in mostly empty space,
explores countless star systems and planets –
some gas giants and some just barren rocks.

Often too hot, too cold, or too toxic,
no evidence of life found anywhere
until it detects coherent signals
from a star just a few light years away.

After arriving at this star system,
it explores the planets – one with broad rings,
another small and red, then a surprise –
a lone blue planet covered with water.

An aquatic world never seen before
in its journey through the vastness of space –
unprecedented and abundant life
on the verdant oasis we call Earth.

The water home of homo sapiens
and countless other plants and animals,
changing forevermore by our actions
with no other refuge available.

(read at Poetry Sunday service at UUFDC with the
theme: “Celebrate Water,” April 29, 2018)

looking back...

*Lucky Break**

Over three hundred years ago,
when the Swedish Army marched to war,
an officer brought his two young sons –
the youngest returning to Sweden
before Peter the Great and his army
annihilated the Swedes at Poltava.

The captive father spent years in Russia
before returning home to Sweden,
but the older son's fate is unknown –
the younger son, who missed the battle,
later got married and had a son,
my own great, great, great, great-grandfather.

We often recognize the importance
of twists of fate in our daily lives,
but it is unusual to find
a three century old stroke of luck –
a young boy who avoids a battle
and forms a link in the chain of my life.

* In 1709, the Russian army defeated the Swedish Army at the Battle of Poltava. Genealogical research related to this battle by my cousin Douglas Erikson (one "s") inspired this poem.

Lonely Together

Over seventy years ago, Anaïs Nin warned of the consequences “now that we believe we are in touch with a greater amount of people, more people, more countries. This is the illusion which might cheat us of being in touch deeply with the one breathing next to us. The dangerous time when mechanical voices, radios, telephones, take the place of human intimacies, and the concept of being in touch with millions brings a greater poverty in intimacy and human vision.”*

* * *

We used to gather together
for conversation at dinner,
then television took over,
but today our eyes are glued
to seductive, not-so-smart phones.

We used to write lengthy letters,
then the telephone – quick, easy,
later email – quicker, easier,
now we send terse text messages,
our memories lost in the cloud.

We used to read the newspapers,
then listened to the radio
until television arrived,
now we gather our news online,
endless and mostly unvetted.

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We used to converse while driving,
then back seat kids watched videos,
followed by Wi-Fi enabled
games on savvy phones and tablets
– even drivers watch screens, not roads.

We are connected to millions,
but our relationships suffer,
technology controls our lives
– time to put it down, turn it off,
and reclaim our humanity.

* complete text: “The secret of full life is to live and relate to others as if they might not be there tomorrow, as if you might not be there tomorrow...This thought has made me more and more attentive to all encounters, meetings, introductions, which might contain the seed of depth that might be carelessly overlooked. This feeling has become a rarity, and rarer every day now that we have reached a hastier and more superficial rhythm, *now that we believe we are in touch with a greater amount of people, more people, more countries. This is the illusion which might cheat us of being in touch deeply with the one breathing next to us. The dangerous time when mechanical voices, radios, telephones, take the place of human intimacies, and the concept of being in touch with millions brings a greater poverty in intimacy and human vision*” (from May, 1946, pp.148-149, “The Diary of Anaïs Nin,” Volume Four: 1944-1947, HBR, 1971).

(read at Dickinson Poetry Series, Jan. 10, 2018)

1968: A Year in Headlines

Epigraph

In the early spring of 1968, my physics professor observed that it was “not a good time to study physics.”

Some dates become members of our lexis – when we know the year, we know the story, 1968 became such a year, overfilled with exceptional events.

North Korea seizes the spyship *Pueblo*,
Dr. Spock convicted of draft card charges,
North Vietnam springs the TET offensive,
Viet Cong prisoner executed.

Cronkite says Asian war “mired in stalemate,”
Memphis sanitation workers strike,
Kennedy and McCarthy campaigning,
hundreds slaughtered in My Lai massacre,

The “Prague spring” angers Soviet Union,
Johnson declares he will not run again,
Martin Luther King assassinated,
riots develop across the nation.

Vietnam peace talks begin in Paris,
The Supreme Court bans burning of draft cards,
Robert F. Kennedy wins primary,
assassinated in L. A. hotel.

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Military draft includes more students,
Johnson signs Non-Proliferation Treaty,
Nixon nominated for president,
Soviet Union crushes “Prague spring.”

Police and soldiers violent rage against
protests at Democratic convention,
feminist protests at *Miss America*,
Black Power protests at the *Olympics*.

Johnson halts bombing of North Vietnam,
Nixon wins with narrow plurality
claiming a secret plan to end the war,
Pueblo crew returns from North Korea.

Apollo 8 achieves lunar orbit,
crew photographs “Earth rise” over the Moon,
reads text from Genesis on Christmas Eve –
the peaceful end of a tumultuous year.

(earlier version read at Dickinson Poetry Series,
September 8, 2010)



Bridging the Gap

...for Roland

I grew up in middle class West Allis,
where diversity meant you were
either Lutheran or Catholic;
when the Vietnam draft threat increased,
I had to forgo graduate school
and sought refuge in a defense job.

Coming from a mostly white city,
I was surprised when I met my boss,
an engaging Black American
with a doctorate in physics,
formerly a college professor –
rare for a black man in the sixties.

We both had received our first degree
in electrical engineering;
this gave us a common lexicon
to discuss his research and testing
of improved sonar materials –
I soon became immersed in our work.

We enjoyed working together and
also considering life's questions,
I studied countless papers and books,
took classes, and helped write our papers –
in this way earning my version of
a master's degree in acoustics.

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He helped me grow as an engineer
and develop my personal goals;
separated by career changes,
we remained friends and kept in contact –
I didn't hesitate to call him
when facing a crucial decision.

Just a few years before he died,
he made a brief visit to my home;
we discussed each other's activities
as easily as we had before –
our friendship was still alive and well,
many years after we had first met.

Friendship creates lasting connections
that transcend racial prejudices –
united by similarities,
not divided by differences,
a world where all are celebrated
and peace becomes a reality.

(read at UUFDC Poetry Sunday service with the
theme: "Racial Justice," April 30, 2017)

dark times...

A Year of Loss

First it was Jim at 71,
a sudden death in a hospital;
my best high school friend and golf partner,
he studied engineering in school,
then worked in the auto industry –
our paths diverged as we grew older,
but we kept in touch from a distance.

Then Neal passed away at 68
after years of fighting leukemia;
my brother and closest relative,
we shared a lifetime of memories,
the engineer in our family
and an expert rebuilder of cars –
a dear brother who is sadly missed.

Later Jack died at age 95,
his body failing like the one-horse shay;
my late life golf partner, friend, and neighbor
at the beautiful place called NorthBluff,
blessed with many kids and grandchildren –
and like Neal and Jim, an engineer,
but our friendships were much more than that.

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Finally, Fred died in Hawaii
after years of protracted illness;
a long-time friend of Karen's brother,
Fred did yeoman service helping us
provide long distance care for Loren
that was truly indispensable –
assistance we will never forget.

The sudden loss of these special friends
was overwhelming and depressing,
bringing forth tears and thoughts of the past,
I enjoyed being with each of them
and miss the times we had together,
we shared a collective memory
impossible for others to know.

Many years of experiences
that now exist only in my mind,
difficult to discuss with others,
only remnants of our treasured past
remain and they are fading away –
it is not easy to say good-bye
to those who can never be replaced.

Siblings

Our parents are past tense,
our children are future tense,
our siblings are present tense.

...inspired by an article by Ron Suskind

the rest of the story...

*Genetic Diversity**

My parents met at a dance,
my dad's parents were from Sweden,
my mother was from Slovenia,
– the cold Baltic Sea meeting
the warm Mediterranean.

I was always happy and proud
of our family's ethnic
and genetic diversity –
but this apparent strength
had an unforeseen problem.

When a family member
needed to find a donor
for a bone marrow transplant,
the doctors were optimistic
due to our Swedish surname.

Although Sweden is a small country,
many northern Europeans
were listed in the registry,
but they may have overlooked
our mother from Slovenia.

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There aren't many Slovenians
on the transplant registry
and even fewer that are
half Swedish and half Slovenian –
they couldn't find any matches.

A rare mixture of genetics
from people of two small countries –
one at the crossroads of Europe,
perhaps made it more unlikely
to find replacement parts that match?

*inspired by "...finding the right transplant for a patient of color is a challenge...Whether it's because of geography or history, patients of color have often seen more racial mixing over the centuries than Caucasians...The odds of finding a match drop even more for people of mixed-race background and particular ethnic groups with a long history of racial diversity...countries such as Japan and Korea...have more homogenous population, making it relatively easier to find matches..." (from "The struggle to find bone marrow matches is harder for some ethnic groups" by Josie Huang, Oct. 1, 2013, Southern California Public Radio, 89.3, KPCC, scpr.org)

the joys of aging...

Night Lights

In a time now forgotten,
our homes became dark at night,
perhaps a blue pilot light
or red coals in the furnace –
now, every room is filled
with tiny pinpoints of light.

As we sleep, our devices
illuminate our dark rooms –
bright digital numbers on
clocks, microwaves, and ovens,
blue, green, red and orange lights on
TVs, convertor boxes,
computers, routers, chargers,
alarm systems, power strips,
answering machines, timers,
sensors, switches, and night lights.

A sparkling constellation –
each tiny light telling us
an electronic device
is ready to give service –
if the power keeps flowing
and the internet stays up.

(read at Dickinson Poetry Series,
Mar.14, 2018)

Mind Over Matter

Just a simple physical exam
with my new doctor
and a medical student,
still a stressful setting that
elevated my blood pressure
to 150, higher than usual,
must be an anomaly?

Two weeks later, a re-test,
took some relaxing breaths,
but again a high 147,
then a break to relax
with more big breaths,
now a drop to 142,
better, but not good.

Then I forgot about breathing,
let my mind wander away,
drifting off to the north woods,
entering a peaceful trance,
the third result was 127 –
sometimes success is easier
when you stop trying.

Your Final Notice

The telephone calls are unending –
my computer is generating errors,
my listing hasn't been updated,
I haven't bundled my services,
my power may be disconnected,
my water bill is past due,
I must send money to the IRS,
and now the door bell rings
– will it never end?

Parts Inspector

His mother is elderly,
lives on a modest income;
works as a parts inspector,
not at an assembly plant,
but in a big shopping mall
outside a women's restroom –
she performs gender checking;
required by the bathroom bill,
it's not a difficult job –
she has never stopped someone,
but she says it would be nice,
if all of us had zippers.

(inspired by a new bathroom law in
North Carolina and discussed for
Wisconsin; read at Dickinson Poetry
Series, May 10, 2017)

Thoughts at Seventy-Three

I like
physical exercise,
music and poetry,
good books and good stories,
lunchtime conversations,
thoughtful ambiguity.

I don't like
rules, creeds, or dogma,
narrow rationality,
confusing uncertainty,
acceptance of everything,
acceptance of nothing.

Simple Pleasures

The morning Sun sends streaks of light across the floor,
the dazzling white snow covers the empty yard,
a red cardinal pecks at the sunflower seeds,
a book and hot cup of coffee sit by my side,
notes from a violin concerto fill the room,
our little dog Misty relaxes on my lap
– life is good.

closing thoughts...

After Fifty Years

When he was an old man,
my dad said life was short –
now that I'm an old man,
I understand what he meant.

I met my wife, Karen,
at a Sunday School class,
on Monday we were friends,
sharing classes in school.

Tuesday there came college,
and we began dating,
we married on Wednesday,
honeymooned in Door County.

Kids arrived on Thursday –
a great son and daughter,
five charming granddaughters
soon followed on Friday.

Saturday we rested,
sharing cups of coffee
and many memories
after our busy week.

Life is a mystery
filled with its ups and downs,
but a loving partner
makes the journey better.

memories...

Misty: 2005-2018

A sweet little dog
friendly to everyone
fourteen pounds of heart

Canine Therapy

Our little white bichon, Misty,
loves taking walks in the woods –
the trees and animals help her
get in touch with her inner wolf.

Walking the Dog

Man and dog walking,
coyote threatens, dog growls –
partners on a leash.

(written with Karen Eriksson)

Wisdom from Misty

The dog isn't the question,
the dog is the answer.



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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