



**CMON!
GET
HAPPY!**

mike finley

cmon get happy!

Poems by Mike Finley

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LATE MARCH SNOWSTORM, A HOPEFUL SOUND

It falls wet and heavy on the house.
I open the drapes and see it come down,
watching the yard,
where the snow had melted,
fill again with white.

Then I hear it, from all sides.
The robins and cardinals,
returned from the south,
finding shelter in the hollows of the firs,
they are singing madly,
they are glad to be home.

OF COURSE IT WAS A DREAM

I awoke late and lay there for several minutes,
before pulling myself up and sat on the edge of the bed.
Outside it was still late winter, the cars were where
they had been the day before.

Of course it was a dream.
I was in some strange city that was half fairgrounds
and half MIT, when my cell rang
and it was her.

Hello?

My knees buckled. I didn't want to believe.
"Is that you, son?"

"Daddy," she said, "I'm waiting here.
I want to see you so bad."

I should have known from the difficulty I had
finding clothes to wear.
Nothing stayed on me, nothing fit,
so I wrapped a bath towel around me
and ran.

I ran through the fairgrounds, but I couldn't get out.
I smashed through the hedges
and found myself on a campus
with an endless series of stairs.
I ran from auditorium to auditorium,
clutching my towel.

I passed a vendor selling work clothes in the quad,
heavy denim, with copper rivets,

and thought to myself, that's odd.

A man asked if he could be of assistance.
I need to get home, I said, but I don't know how.
Oh, you need a map to get around, he said.
I asked where, he pointed far back the way I had come.
And I ran.

I backtracked perhaps a mile, running through buildings
and hedges and midday rides.
I ran until my heart was heaving
when I came to a booth that sold maps,
and a man in a long apron handed me a phonebook.

I punched the keys, and a voice came on
and said "The number you have dialed is not in service.
Recheck the number, and dial again."

I sat on the edge of a disheveled bed
and stared at the street outside.
Ice dripped from the eaves above.
A pair of cardinals hopped from a branch.
But it was the same tree, the same cars,
the same hard snow as before.

HOW I THINK ABOUT MY FATHER

i know he felt shame for quitting his family.
But I also think he felt he was a good guy
who never got credit for meaning well.

It wasn't his fault his daughter was born sick.
He wasn't the reason his wife was the way
she was, at least he didn't think so.

Later in life he undertook to make amends.
helping tenants who were in sorry straits,
even testifying against other bad fathers.

He lent out money and forgave the rent,
He came to be considered a man to turn to
once his second wife had bled the evil out.

He gave up drinking and smoking and steak,
He golfed in the desert early each morning,
and eventually stopped chasing the waitresses

who had tempted him all of his life,
with their snug rayon uniforms, their lipstick,
the arousing way they slipped him the check.

So when a tumor sprouted around his lungs
the size of a pie-plate, he felt gypped once again
and cursed his luck, and in his wretchedness

he ratted out everyone he ever thought he loved,
especially me, for remembering everything
and always reminding him of his failures

But out of this I have saved one good memory,

of the Fourth of July at Cascade Park in Elyria,
after the great finale had filled the sky with smoke

He bundled up my sister who had fallen asleep
and wrapped her in the red blanket we had sat on
and carried her tenderly in his arms to the car

And I stumbled after, because I was small
and I was tired, too, but knowing this was
the one moment I would love him

FALLING OUT OF A MOVING AUTOMOBILE

My mother didn't get her driver's license till she was 27. I know, because it is an early memory, driving with her from Columbia Station to the testing center in Berea, every six weeks or so.

She would buy me off with one of those long pretzel rods from Nickles Bakery, the kind they kept in a see-through canister by the cash register at the tiny market in Olmsted Falls, always standing upright, commanding the attention of every child buying groceries with his mother. Pretzel rods were better then than they are now.

My parents formed a strange covenant, that I found out about as I got older. My dad would have primary responsibility for my older brother Pat, while my mom took me.

This seems like a bad idea in retrospect, but that is what they did. I think Pat would say this was a logical course of action. He loved our dad, who taught his chess, and baseball, and games.

And my mom and I were spitting images of one another.

I remember I wooed her, and promised her a better life as soon as I came online. We would get a new car, not the old humpback Plymouth she learned to drive in. I would take her away from all the cares of life. She would waitress at Stouffer's no more in my regime.

My mom got her license on the sixth try. I was too young to know what she was doing wrong. But I remember no one had seat belts in those days, and I regularly rolled around in the back seat, and bumped against the door. I suppose she was not slowing down enough for turns. I remember the tires screeching a lot.

In those days people went "for a drive" for fun. Proud of being mobile, our mom drove us all over the Greater Cleveland area, as far east as Ashtabula, as far west as Avon. We saw the lake. We saw the oversized Easter Baskets in the park, with the tulip and daffodil bulbs flowers embedded in them. We drove downtown, across the mighty screaming bridges of Cleveland, with giant semis right alongside us, and the figure of the Terminal Tower looming high overhead like a colossus. I felt like I was at the very center of amazingness, driving with our mother through the industrial city.

But she was not a good driver. One day we drove through the Metropolitan Gorge, a lengthy ravine going through Cuyahoga County, with steep sides, and roads that actually went across the river -- not bridges, but fords. So the car splashed right through the river, which was more of a brook at this point.

One day all three kids were in the car. We all cried "Wheel!" as we splashed through the fords, water flying away from us to the right and to the left.

We began climbing a steep hill in the Plymouth, which had a standard transmission that caused my mom all sorts of trouble. She didn't know how to set the emergency brake, if there was one. As we neared the top of the hill, leading steeply to the rocks and river below, the Plymouth stalled.

Our mom freaked. She kept pushing the car's ignition button -- it would have been a very easy car to steal. But instead of forging forward, the car began to roll backwards. Our mom, in full panic, felt the car sliding diagonally back until the bumper pressed against the cable guard -- the thin protection against tumbling down into the gorge. The steel cable felt as taut as a rubber band.

"Everyone out!" she cried. Then she made us tiny kids -- tiny and deoxygenated in Kathy's case -- stand behind a 2-ton automobile

about to go over a cliff, and to prevent that from happening with our little bunny arms and muscles.

She kept pushing the button, and the car would wheeze, ease forward, and stall out, forcing us kids closer to the brink.

It was hopeless, and not a little irresponsible.

And we would all have been pushed backward to certain mushy and possibly flaming death, had a man not come upon us, like an angel of the Lord. He set his own emergency brake, cleared us kids away, started up our car, quickly eased into first gear, and pulled the Plymouth away from the steel cable railing.

We drove home in silence.

But the laws of the universe did not change much. One day in the late summer of 1955 -- I am guesstimating here -- we were out on an errand, in the heart of Olmsted Falls, my brother and sister and me. I remember staring up and out of the back window, behind the seat, up at the telephone polls looping overhead. I was about to fall into a nap state.

But I didn't, because our mother took a fast turn and I rolled over toward the rear passenger door. The centrifugal force of my mom's hard left turn, combined with the weight of my small body smacking into the door handle, was enough to cause the door to open. And out of the car I tumbled.

We were going maybe 25 miles per hour.

I remember every microsecond of the spill. I tumbled headlong, with my hands in front of me-- kids are skilled at falling, you know. I fell at such an angle, missing the rear wheel entirely, that I flew over the gravel alongside the road, and into the tall grass of the shoulder sloping away from us.

I remember hitting the grass, and feeling its softness in my hands, and against my face. And still I rotated, somersault after somersault, like a slinky, down the grade of the grassy hill.

I struck no rocks, no beer bottles -- which people just threw out their car windows in those days -- no obstacles of any kind.

I was aware that this was happening only a block from St. Mary's Catholic Church, the place I spent so many Sunday mornings at pewside, casting about for something interesting.

But this tumult in the grass was interesting. I rolled, by my estimate, about 50 feet, and then came to a soft stop, still a couple of yards from the beautiful, rippling Cuyahoga, that pours over the ledge in that town in a wonderful seamless cascade, that reminded me of my mother's tortoise-shell comb.

My mother raced down the slope to engulf me. Say one thing for her, she was not above self-reproach, and she castigated herself for several seconds before obtaining a promise from us kids that our dad never needed to find out about this.

And we piled back into the car and drove the four miles home. The sun was low in the afternoon sky, and the leaves on the poplar trees shimmered like dimes in the late light.

And i began having thoughts that I would never die, that there was no danger in the world, and those thoughts have persisted, wrongly, to this very day.

DOWN WITH EMOTION

It is accepted that emotions are good things ... that denying them leads to inexpressivity, addictive alternatives, and possibly constipation.

To be anti-emotion pretty much marks you as a psychological Puritan, or the coach who tells you to suck it up, slap the wound with tobacco juice, and get back out there and play.

Being unemotional is American. We're movie people, soap opera people, flag-flying people. The Puritans would dismiss the fifth freedom -- the freedom to cry.

Leslie Gore's "It's my party and I'll cry if I want to" stands as a bookend to Barbara Fritsche's "Shoot if you must this old gray head ..."

We're entitled to it. It heals our wounds. It's who we are.

And yet ...

I learned late in life that I am hyperemotional. This just means that on the scale of emotionality, I am way over there. It may be part of being (gently) bipolar. And I'm here to tell you, that this supersensitivity really doesn't get you anyplace.

I am the guy howling with laughter at the cineplex, because I want to be amused, like a sponge wants to be wet.

The guy at the party who tells jokes, dances, and wants that extra drink, anything to keep the fun going.

The guy who at all times wants to flag people down and have a terrific conversation -- about anything, even the Twins -- but

everyone always has somewhere to go.

At the end of all these efforts to maximize experience, is yes, another feeling, frustration. And sometimes anger, that no one wants to play. =(

More and more I think the stick-in-the-mud crowd has it right. Just be cool. Want not. Detach. If you feel a storm coming on, accept it, but let it pass. Don't try to climb up into the thundercloud. Definitely don't hurling shafts of lightning at innocent bystanders.

My wife says, change. Easy for a half-sphinx, half-chameleon to say. She is only comfortable outside her comfort zone. I call her child bride, though she will be 60 in April. I suspect she will live to be 130. When we go out, people assume I'm her father. We're like ten months apart, but they are really apart.

Emotion did this to me.

* * *

I think a lot of people are like this. Some are famous. Most are just messed up.

The problem in part is that I reward myself for being this way. Being a writer means you align yourself with intense feeling and perception. There are always a few people who think it's the bees' knees. Enough to encourage you to think it's a good thing, you're on the right track.

Rachel has been studying about brains the past year. It's all about brains, friends. Some of us have great, cool brains -- sagacious, dispassionate, able to separate themselves and their needs and dizzying desires from the matter at hand.

Others of us are strictly Abby Normal.

I sometimes think I would have been a big hit in a more backward time, like the Dark Ages. A jester, a soothsayer, a stirrer of pots. It was a more tolerant time.

My mother did an unusual thing in 1971 -- came down with juvenile diabetes at age 45. Medically speaking, this is weird, as the name of the disease properly suggests.

But there was a reason. She sent her daughter, 15, to the dentist to get her baby teeth pulled. My sister was a blue-baby -- congenitally messed-up heart ailment that no longer exists. Her blood supply was so deoxygenated that her baby teeth never pushed out, and so became mossy and diseased.

The dentist had my mother sign a waiver. Good thing because during the procedure, undertaken because Kathy's teeth looked dingy, she went into a coma, and died two days later.

My mother knew that her feelings about Kathy's teeth led directly to her death.

And so, being a hyperemotional woman, she willed herself to come down with a child's disease, one which led directly to her own death -- 40 sorrowful years later.

Ah, and it's the Irish that flows inside us, that holds us to its heart. A surge of emotion that takes its toll of the body, blood sugar rising and falling like the sea.

And what good does this sensitivity do a person? It octuples their poetry output.

* * *

God gives each one of us a unique hand of cards to play, and play it we must, for we have no real alternative.

My daughter, a rebel to her fiery core, was hyperemotional as well. She lost her crappy pizza parlor job -- please don't eat at Pizza Luce -- so she took her life.

There were other issues as well, some of them so awful that you start to see her point.

But my point is that her emotion -- the thing that distinguished her from all others -- her brilliant spirits, her wonderful, rippling-brook sense of humor -- was what did her in.

What amazes me, and it's a mathematical issue, is that the deck of cards God deals from has such crappy hands, so many of them, so laughably unplayable.

It is like making sense of a shredded newspaper.

I totally understand turning your cards over. Love you, girl.

But I wish there were instead a dial somewhere, so people like my mother, my daughter, and me could turn down the intensity. Leverage against the fire.

We don't need to be playing all the time.

It's plain that other people's need or desire to engage is a fraction of what ours are.

Rachel says, meditate. But I'm willing to guess that hyperemotional people probably rank among the world's worst meditators. Or we do it, but even our meditation is a party. Not that I know how to measure and compare normal emotion to hyperemotion -- probably involving brainwaves and electrodes --

but it would be hard to get normal people to slow down and take the test.

Maybe begin by accepting that this is just the way it is, and there is no fix for it.

God made me this way, and whatever he finds amusing, that should be OK with me.

OUT DRIVING

In the dusk, in the snow,
it looked like a bookshelf
propped against the bus sign.

Rectangular, with wooden slats,
A bookcase by the bus-stop,
what an odd combination.

But it wasn't a bookshelf,
it was a box-spring someone
left by the highway.

It was a box-spring
leaning on the bus-stop post,
not a bookshelf after all.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE

We were like jewels glinting off
one another's light,
sapphires, rubies, garnets, pearls ...
our teeth were so beautiful
and so was our skin,
nothing old could hold us in,
our poor parents were at a loss to contain
this savage perfection,
the Buick roaring from gravel
onto highway,
laughter and beauty and limitlessness,
six-packs of Rolling Rock,
sexy cruel sneers,
and our poor dear mother
in her babooshka and apron
carting Kleenex out of our rooms,
and father with his yellow sponge
daubing at the car seats.
What religions would we not topple?
What ancient wisdom would be next to fall?

DON'T BE LIKE THE MOON

Don't be like the moon, your face all scars,
dismayed by your bombardment.

If you choose to be like the moon,
you will be relegated to night,
a lantern in the darkness.

The world must carry the moon on its shoulder
like a stillborn child to the grave.

Do not be bewildered like the moon
Do not gaze open-mouthed into space
Do not dwell in memories gone bad

Be like the earth you were plucked out of,
The one that lives, that farts and sighs

Deny your losses, shed your skin,
Pack away the dead so they cannot be seen

Make roses grow between the rows
Be like the blooming earth and forget

GHOST IN THE HOUSE

I am the ghost who lives in this house.
Every night I give you my kiss.
I cover your sleeping face with my hands.
I look into your eyes with tenderness.

I am the ghost who lives in this house.
The floorboards creak where I stand.
I stand at the window, drapes flowing.
I talk to the moon like an old friend.

I am the ghost who lives in this house.
People come and people go.
The secret I cannot convey,
That I lived and loved and knew.

THE SIGN IN THE STORE WINDOW

When you say you can't imagine
I know exactly what you mean --
you mean it hurts to imagine,
and who needs that unnecessary pain
when there is enough of the real stuff
to go around.

The truth is we imagine all the time
of course
and as bad as this is
we imagine worse.

If you couldn't imagine
you wouldn't be afraid.

The truth is we are losers,
we will lose everything we know,
each lovely face will crumple in the flame
and if we don't see it
it's only because our face
caught fire first,
but someone saw
and someone's heart
must break.

We knew what the deal was
when we signed on.

Everything must go,
as the sign in the store window says.
The shelves will be stripped
and the roof set ablaze,
and every thing

be swallowed in the roar.

It's no good to walk the chalk line,
bereft, mumbling, tearing at our hair
and clothes, no one can live
for a week like that.

But it's not a bad thing to pack it away
in the back of our mind, closeout,
clearance, make us an offer

The other creatures, rooted in the earth
or yawning in the grass,
don't have to deal with this.

Next time life seems pointless,
next time you want to watch it
shoot out of the can,
remember that fact.

Why would this excruciation occur,
why are you able to imagine this
and so much more,
until every tear sizzles to nothing,
if you meant nothing?

If your heart doesn't break ...
you're not here.

DISHWASHER

It's by far the best job in a restaurant
The cooks by contrast are up to their elbows
in anguish, racing to meet their requirements

The waitresses are all scribbling salad orders,
trying to keep everyone's dressing straight.
The barkeep pretends to listen to stories
but really he's keeping an eye out for trouble.
And the coat check girl with the big brown eyes
stares from her stool in the darkened box

Whereas the dishwasher warms his blood at the wrists
And the hot and soapy water goes to his heart
like wonderful liquor.
Everyone yelling but he doesn't hear.
He is writing a song about love in America.
And all he has to do are the dishes.

(1982)

PLUSES AND MINUSES OF THE SUICIDE OF A CHILD

The first thing is, you realize
you never have to worry about that one again.
The play is finished, the suspense
has passed, and the horrors
that lay likely ahead --
the crimes, disappointments, the late-night calls,
the tears, the setbacks,
a phonebook of pain and destruction --
can close now.

Then you realize that people are not going to be bringing
you their small problems and heartaches
ever again, and asking for your sympathy,
and for a time that seems an advantage,
until you find out
how much you miss it.

Eventually you learn
you are still attached to that person
and that you can't help continuing
the conversation that you had started,
and then got interrupted.
You go to them for consultation,
because they know everything,
and have nothing better to do
than to go on being part of you.

But it's no good really.
Those you still love must look into your eyes every day
and be silent about the cavity
that has opened up among you,
the face that cars and buildings
and trunks of trees are sliding into the ravenous,

groaning, foothold-killing thing.

And because you love them
you give them your best,
and reassure them the way you did
from the beginning, from the earliest, happiest days.
"Darling ones, it's going to be all right."

THE BARD AND THE ELBOW OF THE WHALE

I am feeling philosophical, and the topic that floats to mind is bardism.

The idea of the bard is an old one. Long ago bards and priests were probably one class of shamanic person, the one in charge of teaching in a community.

But as roles specialized, priests followed magic and bardic figures followed words, and the art of persuasion. The bard became the person who kept the community alive by speaking memorable truths.

The bard was an orator, a rhymer, a joke-teller, a story-teller, a teacher who knew how to say vital things in such a way that they stuck in the heads of community members.

Homer, if there was a Homer, was a bard. I like to think there was an actual author of that work, but if there were it came at the very end of the bardic era.

The bard may have been a maniac, but he served the community, reminding them when to plant, how to go to war, the right way to live and die.

You can argue with part of this, but the thing I want you to hold onto is the notion that the bard, the poet, had a vital function in the community. He was a kind of godfather, the guy who could make things happen, by the power of language and memory.

At the high water mark, bards were considered the MVPs of their communities. When two warring lords sat at supper, a bard was placed between them, because it would be suicidal for the community to involve a bard in a fight or assassination -- how

would people survive the winter without their walking, talking almanac? It would be killing the medicine man – no more medicine.

Bardism had a natural life cycle, and it became obsolete. As literacy spread, and people could commit memory to paper, the need to have a person speaking the words into our ears decreased. Bards were among the first people to be disintermediated by language technology. They were replaced by librarians.

When the job of bard disappeared, people with the power of the bard to speak memorably were shunted aside, like samurais in medieval Japan, to find their own way in the world.

(One movie begins with a crafty samurai asking if he can hang himself from a nobleman's apple tree -- knowing that the noble would then be honor-bound to invite the down-on-his-luck warrior in and feed him.)

It has been downhill ever since! Poets -- bards without portfolio -- have tried to catch on as courtiers, jesters, entertainers, and old hermits high up the mountain.

The lucky ones won patronage, saying what pleased the nobility. Everyone sought public approval by saying what pleased people generally, like street musicians.

Many starved or took their lives, because a rift had opened up between them and their natural calling -- to be of authentic service to the larger group.

There have been efforts by poets, especially in their youth, to recreate the idea of the community bard. Some of these were hoaxes like Chatterton. Some were entertainments, like Shakespeare and Walter Scott. Some were hoary fictions, like early Yeats. Some were shape-shifting wisdom writers like Robert

Bly, who pretended or perhaps actually thought they were bards. Whether they were actually of use is debatable. They certainly feel they are, warning us against evil wars and enemies of sound culture.

The thing is, everything about the way we live has combined to make the posterity of the bards -- poets -- disconnected and un-reconnectable from people.

We have books in the libraries telling us when to plant. We have no great need for visionary individuals to tell us how to vote or think -- you can practically get that from vending machines now.

The role of poets has been so reduced that we do not even think of them as being decent jesters or entertainers any more.

Hop-hop artists may be the exception to that. Their poetry is unignorable, political, and vivid in the extreme. But by and large, poets today are mere vestiges of what the mighty bard once was -- the voice of survival. We are linked to survival. We are luxuries that no one needs, and no one wants to feed.

Literacy and technology have made even the ancestors of the bards -- poets and storytellers -- largely irrelevant.

So what is to be done?

Evolution would say, keep evolving, until we become so vestigial we are like whales' elbows, once mighty arms, now fins for piercing the briny deep. Poets can whore themselves out to ad agencies, web designers, purveyors of skywriting. Soon they will no longer be classed as poets. They will be wordsmiths, doing manipulative work for hire, overcoming people's sales resistance -- the diametric opposite of survival knowledge -- with the tiniest possible amount of panache.

Me, as a poet and a would-be bard -- I am humbled and horrified by this challenge.

I am a bard, or possibly a kind of prophet, in that I know what the secrets of survival are. I have learned these in the bitterest possible way, by experience.

The wisdom? That life is pain. And living is suffering. And after it, you die. In this sense there is no survival for individuals. There is only the possibility of survival for the community -- and even that is a finite concept. Groups die eventually, just as people do. In between is the warrior's way -- of struggling, of self-control, of working for others, and of acceptance.

But people flee from this truth. They want no part of this kind of bard. As if they ever wanted any part of any kind.

I think what few of us would-be bards care to accept is that the bards worked for the people, and that the people were a small group. Both these things are huge. The first says that the poet's job is no longer about the poet. "Confessionalism" has no place. "Personality" is only useful when it is useful. "Self-pity," whether comical or melancholic, is counter-productive. "Irony," if some people get it, and other don't get it, should probably be taken behind the barn and put down.

All these ground rules are harrowing thoughts for a person like me, who has gotten by all his life on precisely these elements.

It would be an enormous sacrifice to play by these ancient rules. For one thing you would be unpublishable -- no big loss if you are not publishing much anyway, but a big loss in the sense of its finality. It means you will be too uncool forever, and working for peanuts.

The other thing that will have to go is "squeamishness around

sentiment." Most poets abhor sentimentality, and the usual symbols that stir the common heart -- love of country, canine loyalty, us vs them -- all the obvious emotional fields that people are drawn to. A proper bard will, I believe, praise motherhood, not put it on the psychoanalytic couch. You will have to make peace with the idea of institutions -- anathema for many artists.

Serving the community means shaving off a lot of rough corners. Most contemporary poets would rather drink ink than suffer this loss of self. It constitutes a rejection of modernism, and a diminution of identity.

Finally, the community has to want you, and there is no way to command this to happen. What if they want a different bard, or no bard? The new bard will have to woo his or her friends, and bother them at every opportunity, and tell them that they have to accept him. For their part, they have to accept him or drive him out of the circle.

Why? Because the bard must be part of their funny family. Perhaps they will pioneer in having this role develop and grow within their circle. Perhaps these individuals, linked with this peculiar common figure, will find ways to deepen connections and friendships -- so the bard doesn't feel alone.

And the born-again bard will be unable to charge for his services. Like the rabbis in the diaspora, they will have to learn a trade. Being a bard will be a hobby.

Perhaps the new union will make us all a little squarer again ... more cohesive and together ... sharing core values more consciously ... more serious about the bonds holding community together.

The loser in all this is probably the way we think about poetry -- as aesthetic, as odd, as clownish, as melodramatic. But there was

little left of it anyway, in the ways most people think. People don't like poetry. It fails in every possible way – the wrong news coming to the wrong people in the wrong format.

It was the whale's elbow, and now it is time to swim.

HOW TO HAVE GOOD THINGS HAPPEN

If something bad happens
act like you don't quite get it.
Wear that what-the expression
on your face.
That way you never give it the satisfaction
of knowing you hurt.

Walk with a distinct rhythm,
bouncing slightly as you go along,
even if it causes pain or you
are a little bit crippled.
Pretty soon, by definition,
you are dancing.

Love, but be discreet.
Everyone twists an open valve.
See what the other hands are betting
then open it up, so the strong of heart
can stand and follow.

FOR THE LOVE OF GOD

I go through my list of friends' and acquaintances' blogs, but not often enough. I just came across one from last year. A woman I knew adopted a child who had been in a terrible fire, in China, and whose family abandoned him.

It was understood that the boy was disfigured, blind, unable to speak or understand.

Her family took him in, but from the start things went badly.

I didn't know until I read this just how badly.

What makes this story special, beside the fact that I know these people a bit, were the fervent hopes of the woman that the love of God would see them all through.

I have known situations where people come through this kind of hellstorm and their faith actually increases.

Not mine. I have my own little bag of woe to tote around with me. But this story humbles me.

I am interested to hear what you think.

<http://sixcrazymonkeys.blogspot.com/2010/06/new-norm.html>

BURN, BABY, BURN

Rachel told me something interesting before she went north again this time.

"When we were young," she said, "part of our myth about ourselves was that we were different from other people, that we were more intense, had more going on.

"As I get older," she said, "I realize that that isn't true. Yes, some people are low-key. But in their hearts and minds, their concerns burn as brightly as anything you or I ever felt."

She was talking about our friends, her patients, the people we run into every day and don't think very much about.

Every car paused in traffic. Every worker punching in.

Their loves. Their needs. Their disappointments and struggles.

Every house, on every block, is a house on fire.

It's like my favorite quote, that Paul Gruchow gave me, that might come from Philo of Alexandria:

"Be kind to people you meet. For everyone is fighting a great battle."

It is the heart of her Buddhist principles because it is the bedrock of compassion -- seeing that other people are as real as we are, and gasping at their own share of life challenges.

I wonder what else she's right about.

PAUL FINLEYS

It is hard in these times to accept the death of a child but it used to be a common thing. It was one reason families have lots of children -- to absorb the losses due to disease, hunger, violence.

My own father was a replacement child. Two years before he was born his parents -- my grandparents -- had another son, who died of pleurisy.

He too was named Paul Finley.

Life just used to be spookier, as death was an abiding presence in every family. What seems normal to us, almost an entitlement -- our children will surely outlive us -- was not assumed then.

On another note, you wonder about how child-rearing changes when you get a second chance as my grandparents did. By all accounts my dad was raised as a kind of blessing incarnate, as a kind of prince. His older sister and younger brother were not given the same free pass.

It may be that this was why my dad grew up self-involved and not very responsible or ethical. He got into numerous scrapes that, by the standards of the day, were quite shocking. The worst is that he forced himself at age 15 on a young girl, an orphan visiting his family's farm, who then had his baby. That's right, I may have a half-sister out there in the world, whom I have never met.

And it may be because my father had a brother before him, who bore the same name, and who died.

And though he was raised as a blessing, as a kind of miracle child -- his own father cursed him for his transgressions. He told me this story several times, with drunken tears in his eyes.

And then his child died -- my sister Kathleen, one of the last of the "blue-babies," at age 15. (I was 11.)

And then his child's child -- my Daniele, at 24 -- died, by her own hand, one year ago.

Maybe these still are the olden days. And they ain't over yet.

Such unsimple and unnoticed mysteries.

THE PENULTIMATE REVIEW

I came across an item in a box yesterday. It was a yellowed underground magazine from the year 1978, *The North Country Anvil*.

In the magazine, on page 37, was a one-paragraph review of a book of my poems. It was not especially favorable. the words "derivative" and "solipcistic" both appear in it. (Not to worry, I can annihilate them with my mind.)

But what I realized was that it was the last time I got reviewed in print. Not nonfiction, just poetry. That's 33 years without having anyone say anything about me in print -- the lifespan of a messiah.

Not sure what to say about this. A sudden spate of fresh "derivatives" and "solipcistics" isn't going to make my day, or decade. I think one reason is that that was during the "offset revolution," when paper plates (think Insty Prints) made it affordable for anyone with shoes to publish a poetry magazine. So a kind of market flourished for a while, until prices rose again.

Now everything is online, just about. And I have had friends write sweet mash-notes to me on the Facebook pages, etc. Blessings be to all who qualify.

I thought it was interesting that this past August I published my collected/selected works, *Yukon Gold: Poemes de terre*, (<http://mfinley.com/pdf/poemes.pdf>) an event of immense artistic significance. I'm not going to do it again any time soon, at any rate.

The book has not gone completely unnoticed. Friends have come up to me and said, in so many words, "Why is it so long? (The

book is 558 pages long, and barely loads into memory.) Only a thoughtful few have thanked me for the 558 pages I took out.

But it has gone almost completely unnoticed. 33 years. Gosh, that's a long time. Obviously, a conspiracy of unthinkable dimensions has been launched against me and the power my work must represent to the literary elites. I picture them cowering in a fancy room somewhere, sitting under a crystal chandelier, wearing monocles and poking my book with golden barbecue forks.

My inclination is to wait another 33 years, and not fly off the handle. But if things haven't turned around by then, I'm gonna have something to say.

NIGHTTIME IN HEAVEN

was the nicest surprise because
you expect it to always be day

but after dark is when the fun starts
and all the praise is packed away

there is music far across the lake
and occasional applause and whistles

for long stretches everything
is impossibly funny, and you

keep saying of course, of course
except your cheeks don't ache

and there is time for tender walks
under a moon that is bigger than a house

and if you want you can rest on the stoop
hand in hand with your life's best friend

everyone sleeps in a heaving pile
and has the most wonderful dreams

people of every ethnicity smacking their lips
and don't try to do the math on this

but they all hold on to god's pajamas

NONCOMPLIANT

Sometimes you want to let it all go,
stop taking the medicine
and let your cells be.

The whole world is popping pills,
and someone's getting rich
from them.

Better to strike out
for further lands,
until your socks are soaking wet,

Take in the air for the air
that it is and not something
new and improved.

See where it takes you,
how long we last, maybe
make a man of us.

Feel like you're dying
all the time
cuz that's what living is.

CONSIDERATION

It is considered unkind
to let someone sit there and fill up
with their fluids.

They could drown on them
or just come to a halt,
like a balloon
blown full of cement.

So we hand them the box
without saying a word
and they blow out their gunk,
the gunk of sorrow
by the fistful
until something that was light
like a feather
is weighted down and wadded up
with tears and snot,
a salty treat
the dog will want to consider

APOTHEOSIS

Given lengthening life expectancies,
it is logical that a man
will some day enter the ladies room by mistake,
and then it is incumbent upon everyone there
to keep it together,
for the women to be cool,
because this is not the way maniacs act,
this does not lead to blood,
except the blood that goes
to the face
because the man was thinking
about something or other
and pushed the wrong door,
it could happen to you
if you let your guard down
in that sense it is an index of virtue,
because for one second in your life
you were too afraid to be afraid
and you look goggle-eyed into one another's faces,
astonished, befuddled,
perhaps even kindness played on the edges
of that horrorstruck look,
in the way that embarrassment,
nakedness, the fact of our bodies
must bring us together.
even if we then veer off in opposite directions
and never speak of this to anyone,
for a second we were together,
holding everything precious we own
in damp and trembling hands,
and you wonder, if I can do this
and live,
what other limits are there?

PAPA'S PIZZA ON THOMAS AVENUE

They serve house wine in jam jars,
and a combo is playing,
and the owner proclaims them
the return of Francis Albert.

A woman is shown a table,
and when she undoes her hood
she is slender, with a high forehead
and tiny teeth a bit apart.

At another table a girl
who is at most eighteen
and knows she is dynamite
squints and laughs.

I recall that my father
fought another man
in the nursing home
over a woman with a facelift.

The singer loses his way,
reads lyrics from his cellphone.
Though the wine was refrigerated
I understand everything.

POET WASTING

The main reason we hunted them down
was because there
was so dang many of them.

We're not a cruel people,
it would have been crueler
to let them live.

Put a bounty on their heads
and set them loose
at the onset of winter,

run them down before too long
and if you sent the liver
to the DNA

for testing and it
came back OK
you got to keep the whole thing.

It was hard at first, looking into
those plaintive eyes
then jacking the trigger

It wasn't their fault
they were so numerous,
all they ever really wanted

was to say a thing
so it lived a while
in the heart

but even that

got old
after a while

EXPECTANCY

(found poem)

The Lifetime of a lightbulb
is the number of hours it lasts
before going out.
Charlene buys a lightbulb

with a lifetime of 932 hours.

How many weeks can Charlene
expect this lightbulb to last
if she uses it exactly

seven hours and 40 minutes

every single day?

ATHEIST HEAVEN

He is especially tender with these ones
because they lived their lives without comfort
there were no opt-outs from reason
they lived in the crush of what could be seen
and never asked for favors
and they never lied to themselves
and they never were kissed
by the soul's endless night

they were saints of a sort,
of a bleary, chap-mouthed sort
and when it was over
they lurched into dirt
and issued not a complaint

they say he loves them most of all
and gives them the tools
to live without him
the willingness to suffer chief among them
and instead of one guardian angel
they get two
because they have more trouble
to get out of

and now they sit in this room forever
elbow to elbow
legs crossed
smoking pipes and
thumbing the pages of books
without words

they never know
and nobody tells them

how loved they are,
or where

WHAT WE SHOULD DO

Maybe we should all weep more
It dissolves the salts that collect in the corners
It flushes the rings and uncakes the pistons,
It lubricates the entire mechanism

Maybe we should all set aside time
To throw ourselves on the bed and soak it in tears
Like a sponge taking on water
Like a sub going down

Sobbing and sobbing
until we scrape bottom
Maybe we should unratchet
The nut on the hydrants

And hose down the city
With a sloshing of tears
It feels so good coming out
Though it stings, it corrects

The idea that your eyes
Are for seeing only
Maybe if we got it all out
For once and for all

And took a Q-tip to each cranny
And the tanks sound hollow
When banged with a pipe
And the sound echoes through you

Saying empty, I am empty
And we have had a good cry
Maybe it would finally be time

Maybe we could muster the hope

To be happy

HAPPY THOUGHT

People who
worry they

might be
narcissists

probably
are not

THE FAVOR

If people looked to poems
the way they look to music,
that wonderful expectant feeling
when the saxophonist is about to explode,
or the singer shakes her head
and her sweat pelts the front row,
or the wink of the offbeat
that has everyone laughing,
and the drummer playing on
as if nothing had happened.

Music we can listen to for hours on end,
the delight just grows in us,
the love envelops us,
but poetry, well, forty minutes
is a long time to think,
and when the event is over
and the skronk of chairs tells you
it's time to go home,
it's no mystery who did whom
the big favor.

My History as a Man

When I was young and handsome
girls brightened like pennies
when I drew near.
Wonderful, ignorant girls.

Later, smarter, they pulled back from me.
Even though I meant no harm.
Well, I didn't mean much harm.
Not too much, anyway.

Now, they don't even know that I'm there.
I'm like an old pair of pants
flapping on a pole.
Oh ladies, I miss when you feared me.

THE WAGON

I was six when we moved to Vermilion-on-the-Lake,
six doors on Niagara Road from the lapping Lake Erie

I spent all my time walking the bluffs and beaches
staring out at the choppy gray water

one day i took it into my head
to fill my Radio Flyer with dead fish

and roll it back to my mother's house
I don't know what i was thinking

that she had a recipe for 30 pounds
of eyeless, sand-pounded carp

I had to bury them in the field behind us
my mom was very clear on that

and I stood over the grave with a shovel
and I vowed as God was my witness

to keep an eye on my judgment in the future
but I have to say, all these decades later

the problem continues

MY FATHER DIDN'T LIKE ME

I didn't know this until I was 56 years old.
My brother, driving me out to Dad's house in Hesperia to clean up, informed me.

"He wanted to live in the life he made for himself here," Pat said.
"He felt you were always trying to drag him back to the other life, the one he felt he had failed at."

It was like a slug in the stomach,
because no boy ever wanted
to be loved more.

But my brother was right.
My dad had lost a child.
He then divorced his wife.
He was blacklisted by General Motors nationwide for irregularities.
Then he abandoned his children and moved far away,
to a place where cars were not manufactured,
California.

He was 38 years old, young enough to start again.
Naturally his second life was more faithful,
more successful, less riddled with horror.
And there I was, through my phone calls and visits,
the son who could not let go,
a constant reminder
of everything that was left behind.

I understood Dad better now,
that his second life was meant to erase the first,
to make up for it,
and I was supposed to admire his sudden sales abilities,

his entrepreneurial demeanor,
his ability to set money aside,
prosperity blooming in the desert like a smile,
the desert where he lived and golfed.

But I was always there, perhaps maliciously,
to hurt him, perhaps because
it was the only childhood I could remember,
and all I had to do was whisper in his ear,
the word Cleveland.

STEPPING INTO UNDERPANTS

Gets harder every year.
The knees get stiffer, the hips
do not want to make the number four,
the one foot hopping on the floor
leads the body into the bedstead,
the doorknob, the chair.

And the seat of the underpants
is not new cloth,
the fabric has grown tired
from so many washings,
and sittings, and scratchings,
the elastic has been through the dryer
too often, it stretches
but it no longer snaps back.
it is more like a veil than a rampart,
and the stabbing foot could so easily miss
its target and plunge through
the rear panel entirely.

And it will only get worse,
until the old man has to sit on the bed,
and pull them on the way George Washington did,
with a stable boy to assist you,
and an aide-de-camp standing by.

And so you sit,
a polished rag in your trembling hand,
pondering the glories
that are behind you.

WHEN THE MOON SEES US

it sees the sea, it
remembers the rolling

and the heaving
and the wanting to leave

and though it rests now
like a pearl in the night

it rose then into light
dripping and shining

and held up to see

2 A.M.

I awakened
to your sobbing

Don't cry I said
though I knew what it was

and I knew don't cry
is useless advice

I patted you
and thumped your back

like a drum
in the covers

as if the sounds
from the heel of my hand

passed through
in waves

I wanted the vibrations
to set up a hum

and pass through us
like a shout through water

and take it
outside us forever

APACHE DANCE

My parents fought. I did not understand the dynamics at the time, but my dad yearned to party, and my mom wanted him to stay home and be nice.

There was a wild destructive foolishness in his position, and a sick joylessness in hers. They hated each other as if there were no higher calling in the world.

I remember we three children sitting on a braided rug in what was our dining room. For some reason the dining room table was missing. It was late for us, dark -- perhaps past nine. I rubbed my eyes because I did not want to miss the drama.

We crouched together on the rug, which had a circular pattern, like a target. My brother and sister, both older than me, seemed to have a better idea what was going on. Kathy glared at our father, Patrick glanced about in fright. It was all news to me.

Our mother knelt behind us, hiding, either to block the blows from our father, or perhaps just to shame him, to expose him to us. See what your father is like. See.

Paul W. seemed like he might bust loose any moment, break a glass or swing at a lightbulb. He was foul, and made gestures as if to strike us, and then laugh because we were afraid. I think, looking back, he was in despair in some way. I think, looking back, our mother was, too. Their lives had galloped away from them. They had nothing now, except one another.

But what could children know about the knots grown-ups could tie themselves into.

I always, secretly, knew they were mad. Unable to enjoy the most

obvious things -- running in the grass, putting arms around the dog, jumping from the porch. Life was full of little delights, but you would never know that from grown-ups. Their idea of fun was cigarettes. They were full of passion and devoid of laughter. What had become of the children in them.

I think, looking back, that I was the luckiest person in the room.

FLOATERS

It is one of my earliest memories, and it tells you something about the weird boy I was.

I am resting on an elbow lying on my bed on the second floor of my family's duplex in Columbia Station, Ohio.

I am four, and I am looking at the floaters drifting across the surface of my right eye.

They were like one-celled creatures -- though I did not know what those were then. But they were like them -- ghostly shapes with penciled peripheries, like euglenae or paramecia.

If you rotate your eyeball, the floaters shift with you, and are suddenly on another arc of the eye.

I don't know what I am looking at, but I know it is something tiny, that only I can see.

The thought I have at that moment, and that I still remember, is key to the kind of person I was.

"No one else sees these, or cares."

So many times I was on the lookout for secret things.

The looping of telephone lines as the car sped along Nichols Road.

The waving of tall grass in the autumn wind.

The whorls on my thumbs and fingers. The way light shimmered on a puddle in the driveway.

The contortions of nightcrawlers plucked from the slag pile after a rain.

The white doughnut-holes of dog poop that lay in the grass.

The sticky pine sap that slung to my trousers when I climbed.

The golden garden spiders, with their sharp arms and mandibles, that dwelt by the gutterspout alongside the garage.

The red beam of a flashlight showing through the web of my hand.

I was not a scientist, but I loved to observe.

And complement myself that only I was seeing.

And these floaters were like microbial angels that lived on my eyes. They could not be summoned at will. I could only see them sometimes.

ON HAVING MY FIRST HEARING AID IMPLANTED,

1/7/2010

I hear ...

my breath like an athlete
drawing strength for the next heat ...

the murmur of the exhaust fan
reaching out to me from a duct ...

the thud of the windshield blades
dragged across ice...

a new sound from an old CD,
a liquid throb of accordion ...

the grind on the snow-pack
as I step toward the door ...

the gasp of the apple
surrendering to the knife

THE BURNING CAR

This actually happened, the first morning of my new contract,
driving north.

Alongside the on-ramp at Highway 280,
in the dark, just before dawn,
a Mazda Miata sits in its own fire.
Flames rise from an open hood,
smoke billows out doors.

You ease by slowly,
because the ramp is narrow,
but you are afraid of the oily smoke,
aware of the fuel tank boiling with gas.
You hold your breath from the stink.

Internal combustion has broken out.
You think, this is an omen.
You think, I hope they got out.
You think, Christ save us
from ourselves.

ELECTION

Don't take it personally.
The wind comes,
the leaves blow
down the street.

MOON RIVER

*We're after the same rainbow's end --
waiting 'round the bend,
my huckleberry friend*

lyrics by Johnny Mercer, 1961

I think this is the soundtrack to my new religion ...
adrift down the river
with a friend who cannot save us,
cannot stop the war,
cannot set us free.
All we have is one another
heads in our hands
staring up at the stars.

THE BOARDS

Be joyful as you climb the steps
put spring in your toes and the treetops

You are measured out for these sleeves
and boxed in by these exigencies

God gave you bells so give them a shake
let them tinkle to the striking clock

Say oh what a beautiful day
as if you were Gordon McCrea

PROSPECT PARK

The couple on the bench are out of sorts.
You can see in their faces they are on the brink with one another.
Uninvited my old dog saunters up to them,
assuming he will be welcome,
a soft grin on his dazed features.
The couple reach out to him, lay hands
on his scruzzled skull.

ROLLING ON THE RIVER

As you may have noticed, I have been struggling since Daniele's death over a year ago, often quite bitterly, at the inadequacy, or perhaps I should say the overadequacy, of the religious tradition I was part of the past decade.

It was a source of acute pain to me that I belonged to a group that taught that God would rescue us from every danger – it's all in Psalm 91 – and that all things, no matter how seemingly foul, turned to good in the mind of God.

Because: how could that be? How could Daniele's life and death be interpreted as a blessing? Where was the blessing to her? To her family? Was the mind of God so convoluted that we were doing good for others, but taking it in the ass ourselves? And if so, what good was that?

So I have railed against the childishness of the rescuer mode. The recurring example is that mankind is Lois Lane, always falling from the upper stories of the Daily Planet Building, but always rescued by Superman before she arrived at the intersection below.

No matter what part of the world Superman was in, or what point in time he had dashed off to, he showed up.

The overadequacy of that God is that Lois need never learn the lessons life has to teach us about staying away from ledges. She continues with her triumphal notion of the divinity, which has distressing reverbs: a God that excellent is worth invading other countries for, worth limiting the civil rights of citizens for, etc.

He's so good, he's such a perfect package, that bad becomes good. His goodness makes it so.

Two weeks ago, I was at a party -- the Algonquin Hotdish, a local social for freelancers like myself -- and I met a woman author. We had had some of the same publishers -- no miracle there. But she told me she was involved in something called "forgiveness counseling."

Both red and green lights began flashing in me simultaneously. I respected the idea of forgiveness but I was leery of the idea of new age counseling. Candles, harp music, airbrushed angels.

But I told her -- Mary Hayes Grieco was her name -- that I might have a deep need to forgive God. I laid out my story for her, and stressed that I knew my bitterness was not a good attitude to sustain indefinitely.

"Then let's try to fire God," she said, prettily. Meaning, the Superman God idea. "Clear him out of your head. Come up with a notion that makes more sense to you."

So I signed up to do that very thing, and last night I did it.

For two weeks I fretted, because it did not seem like a good idea, when you squinted at it, to "fire" the All-In-All, with his hand on the trapdoor lever. My old pastor had railed at "cafeteria religion" in which the practitioner picks and chooses what attributes he likes, an ala carte faith. I like Luke, but I hate Paul. Like Mother Teresa, not so big on the Inquisition.

And I was doing that here, wasn't I?

But I went forward anyway, to see what was there.

Last night I met with another counselor, not Mary, but a colleague named Theresa. We chatted for an hour about the nature of my problem, and the particulars of my life. Then she led me through a hypnotic lesson.

It is the basic forgiveness lesson that they teach at this “company.” In it, the plaintiff ticks off a list of grievances against the person to be forgiven, with the culprit imaginarily occupying a chair. It is like a debate in which one of the opponents has not shown up. Only, since God is likely invisible, he may have been sitting in the docket.

My job was not necessarily to make perfect logical or legal sense, but to list my complaints, Declaration of Independence style. I did, focusing on Daniele's life, how painful it was for her to live her entire life plagued with acute anxiety problems, OCD, panic attacks, deep depression, deep hostility to her own growth and development, deep antagonism to anyone unlucky enough to try to lead her, a messed up personality, and, according to her at least, attention issues (I never observed them). She was alcoholic, a punk, and ultimately a suicide.

I had other criticisms, but I focused on these. I laid it all at Superman's scented feet. And told him how he had contradicted his own advertised features. How this was supposed to work for the good, how Daniele was unbelievably loved, how prayers were answered, how nothing happens to us so bad that that we cannot handle it. All these suppositions were patently wrong. So I was forced to let him go – let that concept of God the Rescuer dry up and blow away.

I did this with an element of fear in my heart. Firing the Great and Mighty Oz could be catastrophic karma.

Then I was directed to face another chair set up in the room. This was the mystery guest chair, where the new God was sitting. He was not fleshed in with features. He was a cipher – not there at all if I chose that route.

My job was to commence a relationship with this “new” being, to

talk with him and tell him what I needed in a god.

I told him (I didn't really mean "him," it's just an old habit) I did not want to be lied to. I wanted to be told the truth, or nothing at all. I wanted some basic sense of a relationship – an entity I could go to when meditating or praying, that could pick me out of a crowd, that I did not have to fill in every time we spoke. I told him I wanted a connection not just to one religion or one tradition but to the religious spirit of all people. I told him I wanted companionship as I journeyed through loss toward death, not abandonment. I told him I wanted community in the broadest possible sense – with all humanity, with nature, with myself – and not in the narrowest sense, a church of sixty-odd friendly souls.

I told him a bunch of things.

Then, after perhaps fifteen minutes of this, I was directed to rise from my chair, and go sit where "God" had been sitting, and to sit with that spirit, and become one with him. And from that wooden chair look back at where I had been sitting, as if I were merged with the new god, and regard my own figure, sitting on the couch.

It was the eeriest feeling I could describe to you, a god's eye view of myself. I saw how unhappy I had been, how restless and irritable. I saw how good my intentions were, no matter how screwed up the outcome often was. I saw my own effort to live a good life, to be a good husband and father and witness to others, and I found sympathy welling up in me for myself.

And then I spoke to myself, and I astonished myself by echoing the words of Jesus. They were sentences I had copied into a novel I had written back in the 1970s. They came out of me as if they were being blown out of an old grave. I have much to tell you. But you cannot bear it all yet ... For a while I am with you. Then I am not with you ... Fear not ... Behold, I have overcome the world...

They were NT chestnuts, but they were poems, too, koans. I was reminded of the role language had always played for me, how I loved the music in the old Episcopalian church I attended in New Haven, the swells of Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Then things became even weirder. I was channeling Jesus, but this Jesus was an innocent compared to the Jesus of Scripture. My Jesus felt more gullible. He was full of ignorance, unletteredness, skepticism, and humor. My Jesus had morphed into a character I carry close to my heart – Huckleberry Finn!

My Jesus was a companion not to resolve the issue of slavery and avert a terrible war, but a Jesus to accompany me on a raft journey, down the mighty river of life.

It was so odd, I knew I would have trouble describing it intelligently to Theresa. And when the spell passed, and it was time to talk, I blabbed everything to her. She was evidently used to weird stories. Whatever I experienced was my vision, and mine alone.

I think the nexus of it was that it was OK to be me. And I would probably stick with a strange personal amalgam of Jesus and Huckleberry Finn as my totem – just as I had written to myself in 1979, and never published.

Here's that story, if anyone is still reading:

<http://mfinley.com/pdf/jesus-huck-finn.pdf>

Theresa and I hugged and I went out into the cool night.

I felt a tingle along both my arms, and my face was warm to the touch. More importantly, I felt as if every wrinkle of my face, every tired crease, every scowl line, had relaxed. I started the car.

Springsteen singing "Radio Nowhere."

I was still an old man, I found, as I checked the car mirror. But I was relaxed, at peace. And I had not felt that way in years.

THE WOMAN IN SEAT 20C

Sometimes in the
periphery of the eye
you see one.

Someone who knows
the way that
things are.

You know them by
the rings around
their eyes --

paranoid,
hostile,
broken-hearted,

they are the experts
on the way
things are.

You want to cup
her cheek in
your palm

and say I know,
I know, isn't
it awful.

HERTZ DOUGHNUT

*Another major "find" this morning, by the radiator.
This one seems unusually misanthropic.
I carbon-date it to 1988.*

Foolish woman!
Imagining we will
become friends!

You snort and smile
and cover
your face.

You all think we
are such nice guys
when we

are aching
to pump you
full of tears.

Girls under-
estimate the
fusion at hand.

They suppose they
are in charge
and that they dance

because it's
their idea, but
it isn't.

FLIGHT 2238

We took off in a winter storm
after an hour de-icing.

The window seat is nice
but the plastic frame

is broken and there is
no shade to draw.

The plane has a line
of overhead TVs

but the plane drowns out
the sitcom dialogue.

There are peanuts at my feet
but the space is too tight to reach.

My ass hurts but
I can't get up and walk.

Now the door juts upward:
West Palm Beach!

RETURN OF THE PRAIRIE FALCON

When a bird flaps and flies
no one cries.
Why demand that anything stay
when we are all going away?

And when we return
the hurting heart may burn
because something gone now
shows its face,
and that blesses this place.

