



AUTUMNAL MEDLEY:
POEMS AND STORIES

By TCWright

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POEMS AND STORIES

PREFACE

Many of the works in this edition have been published in neighborhood newspapers and journals. Over the last two years three essays (not in this volume) have been chosen to appear on the Dana Literary Society website, for a month. The website is at www.danaliterary.org, and the next appearance will be during November, 2005.

As always, the poems and stories included here are dear to the heart, all coming from personal experience. The stories are each biographical and arranged chronologically; the poems are presented in random order, some written several years ago, many in 2005. Each is an attempt to distill meaning from some aspect of life experienced as "flying." Meaning, intended or not, is the precious belonging of the writer, or the reader. The hope is that each life touched by these works will find that they have discovered a gold mine.

—TCWright, 2005

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Part One
Twenty poems

The Leap

A tiny bird,
still wet from the egg,
fights its way to
the edge of the nest,
driven to fly.

A small boy,
barely three, dreams of
crouching on the porch rail,
leaping like Superman,
driven to fly.

A middle-aged executive
sees that she has
new vision and skills
needed to make a difference,
driven to fly.

Anyone can loose the bonds
formed by centuries of
custom and order
to choose a new whiff
of the possible, to learn
the skills and attitudes
of a new way of life,
driven to fly.

—TCWright
August, 2005

Big Bad Wolf

Death: a startling reality
received differently
by each individual.

For billions,
the termination of a
hopeless existence,
sometimes with the reward
of bliss in an eternal life
beyond. For many it
brings simple oblivion,
promising nothing.
If we do not know,
but only believe,
what is the purpose
of our make-believe?

The shadow of death
is with us always,
lurking at every corner,
waiting to win. It
need not make us afraid
or desperate for
guaranteed safety.
After all, it is basically
a storied threat.
Life is a gamble;
death, a surety.
The promise of our
escaping death is
not convincing, so
why waste our fear?

We walk or run each day
through a dense, dark
woodland, determined
to live or eager to die,
partially conscious of the
fickle odds for survival.

Down Payment

It is anathema
to speak ill
of friendship.
But the past tells me
fragile friendship
is worth nothing at all,
though it seems to be
the only kind available.
Friends are too often
fickle, concentrating
on their own unspoken
agenda of possibilities,
content with a
temporary drive-by
covenant as their
maximum investment.

I wish to urge a less
cautious style in our
relationships; experience
will tell us when really
rewarding friendship is
offered or sought. One
knows real friendship
when it hurts, and it
always hurts.

One has to decide to
accept this pain as the
foothills of a great
adventure, at least
once in a lifetime taking
the risk of plunging in.
Friendship will grow
in amazing ways if it is
built on a foundation of
necessary pain.

—TCWright, 2004

Idea Farm

It is never enough to have a great idea; ideas spring from rainbows of vision and we know from Crazy Horse that visions are sacred. They may be turning points in our lives, always difficult to find and understand.

We hold our ideas close to our chests; almost all of them seem absurd at first, and somewhat embarrassing. We fear the fun others will make of us; we are afraid of being wrong; we doubt ourselves and the dreams to which we have given birth.

But to hold back is to will that the Universe stand still. To stop listening and translating what we receive into appropriate language and images is to deny our uniqueness — the notion that each one of us has a creative contribution to make through our human presence on the globe.

To embody that stance is to sense in others and to know in ourselves an evergrowing openness to being what we are and offering all of that freely to all the citizens of the world.

—TCWright
2004

The Gift of Quality

Life is
perpetually
enhanced
by quality:

a dot of beauty
a moment of care
a timely word.

Look for it
and it will
greet you
from where it
is hidden;
look for it
and name
its presence.

—TCWright
2004

Near Term Memory

Your unsought absence
from my side
does permit me to get
some work done
and allows
some redirection
of the flow of vital
signs and surges.

This is a reluctantly
accepted gift
since attention still
wavers, the to-do
stacks are growing,
my real life seems
only partially lived.

Time apart
does not mean
lack of presence;
I would reach
and touch my love
to you and see your
eyes sparkle in a way
that logic cannot
convey.

So please return,
my delighting distraction,
and free me
to chaos and sloth
once again!

—TCWright
2004

Careful Plot

As we awaken
delightful kinkles
appear at the corners
of your mouth,
a sign of pleasure
slowly transforming
your countenance
into a radiant
"Yes."

My own presence
changes to a
lighter version
of an expectant,
patient lover, eager
to see how you will
set the tone of
our meeting
on this crucial day.
Dawn breaks,
the bond between us
glows real and precious.

You still do not know
of my plan today
to ask the question
which will make
that bond a pledge
of life-long covenant
and mark it with
a golden ring.

—TCWright
2004

Handles on Whether

All is if in the Now
of my life.

If this beginning yields
its promise; ...If this ending
continues its declining
path; ...If that which is in
this moment holds
steady ...or leaves me
in peace.

What I have is neither
past nor future but now,
I know; ... if promise is part
of the fullness of now, then
possibility rings with chimes
of dissonant beauty.

How to still disquiet at
the if in the now is acute
because of what is at stake—
the future of my life and
the lives of others.

I grasp for handholds to
keep panic in its place
and to rejoice fully that I
live.

—TCWright
1998

The Sparks of Creativity

When it happens
I thrill. Electricity
along the spine,
energy spikes as
I complete a segment
of my word about life.

Doing an activity
shocks me out of
stagnation and
self-pity. Look for
another activity
and keep going.

Writing happens.
I maintain the will
to embrace the next
challenge. Creativity
flows, not in some
spooky sense, but
riding on a strong
determination to
get it said.

In these moments
it is work. The fun
begins as I recognize
the creative results
of my ongoing labor:
I identify myself
as author and giver
of the deeps.

—TCWright
March, 2005

Gratitude Month

November—
A time unique for
its focus on
heartfelt gratitude,
the human response to
earth's overflowing
generosity. Even
war's deaths and
our personal losses
are part of the original
inclusive gift, our response
not to be a preset yes or no
based on private personal
preferences.

The basis of gratitude?
Openness to whatever
life brings. If we color it
with likes and dislikes
we have in fact rejected
part of the gift and
truncated our welcome
to life itself.

Energy belongs to a
universal yes and the effort
to adapt our yes to
every part of the gift.
We waste our time and energy
when we struggle to
invoke what we like and
what we reject. We
honor life when we affirm it
just as it comes to us
and put our energy
to making it work.

—TCWright
Aug., 2005

**Part Two
Six Stories**

Fireworks in the Fifties

I grew up in the fifties, an only child after my four siblings left home to attend college, join the military, and get married. The loss to me was quite a shock because these four had given me lots of attention, and suddenly they were gone. My parents were in their middle years and had become used to having four built-in babysitters to take the edge off of the time they had to spend with me. Now those four were gone and my parents had to learn all over again to raise a 13-yr old through puberty and his teens. Since they were almost a generation older than me this didn't come off very well, and I was a very lonely, severely naive child. My playmates were gone. I didn't rebel or complain; in fact, I wasn't conscious of what had happened to my status in the family.

So I grew up more or less on my own, becoming a super-responsible kid with plans of my own in many ways. I was actually not estranged from my parents—just distant, speaking when I was spoken to and doing a lot of guessing about the few questions I did have. My experiences around the Fourth of July are a good illustration of this pattern.

The fourth of July back then—1948-52—was a lot more dangerous than it is now. Today we have such restraining factors as the limit to lighter weapons, various laws banning the hard stuff or all fireworks, public news of fireworks injuries, and reduced availability of any such toys. None of these curtailments were around—except for my awareness of the potential for injuries—and that kept me quite cautious.

I went to high school in a small town of a thousand folks, Laurel, in northeastern Nebraska. A friend of mine had her face burned and rearranged by a roman candle; she held the wrong end of the tube pointed at her face as it went off. That face will be before me the rest of my life. It invokes obedience on my part and a guardian role when I'm with others and fireworks. I became very protective toward my 17 nieces and nephews when I had a chance to be with them on the Fourth; I introduced them very carefully to the dangers involved.

When I was a freshman in high school I found an ad in a comic book for starter kits for commercial fireworks stands. The one that caught my attention was a 100 item box with all the best (worst) in the fireworks of that day. Dozens of basic firecrackers, 3 inch bombs and dozens of cherry bombs, sky rockets, light display tubes, roman candles, sparklers, Vesuvius fountains, black snakes, and many, many more. So I sent away an order for the 100 item box, using money I had earned selling magazine subscriptions. The box was shipped to Laurel on the local train—a small box in a big boxcar. This was mid-June, but I indulged myself occasionally to a blast or two; my friends were jealous, but had no access to a similar arsenal. My parents were aghast at my potential exposure to injury, but we worked out an agreement where they would always know where and when I would fire some off, which was usually at home in our big yard. I welcomed their supervision for the most part; but I also cheated a bit.

The town sheriff, Bill, was on the job when it came to fireworks and the Fourth. He was

After the Fourth.....

.....comes the fifth, the sixth.....etc. In other words, back to the grind. At least that's how most people think of it. In the earlier days, like in the Middle Ages, there were no holidays; just work 7/80, or get kicked off the land. No sick days, no vacation. And it hasn't been all too long ago that such a standard applied to millions of workers, farmers, land owners. Not to work meant not to get paid. In fact, it is still the standard for millions around the world. How fortunate most of us are, with a choice to work or not to work on holidays and vacation hours. How fortunate to have the image of 5/40 per week, or whatever we are willing to work to accomplish our goals. And still we may groan at the reality of, "After the Fourth, work."

Then there are those millions who have retired. I experienced a forced retirement in 1983, but there was little of pension income and that went by rather quickly. With Social Security Disability income, and then, Social Security, and credit cards, I managed for a while, soon followed by painful bankruptcy. There were periods of employment but they didn't last. There were several attempts at forming a lucrative new business, but they all failed. Now it is gifts from family that keep me afloat. I've found that this picture of a retiree in our society is far more common than one would wish. After retirement, work.

For me, there is now "after cancer," and "after false teeth." Medical and dental bills are the new reality, and for the moment these are under some kind of control. After October first there will be an "after smoking" category to be dealt with, and there are others. A year of follow-up is what it will take to boost income and pay bills after these realities, but it has not kept me from enjoying the Fourth. It's after the Fourth that it will be, "back to work."

What about the other "afters" that hold our attention. "After divorce 1986....." has been a big one for me, as it has been for many others. Divorce has been a welcome gift for me, giving me enough distance to reexamine my own life and work on some of the patterns we were caught up in that closed our minds to reconciliation. Then there is, "After the computer conks out, repair or replace." It can take days or weeks to recover. "After the stool overflows, call maintenance." Or, "after a driver's license, a new transportation model." The world-wide tendency that what is built will collapse, and as soon as we are born, we begin to fail and eventually die, is called **entropy**: energy builds for a while, then dissipates to zero as time goes by. Our theme song could be, "After the ball is over....."

And so, the concept of "After....." is universal among us and among nature and things, and we are powerless to affect that change. But we do have power over our response to termination, depletion and other changes. The antidote to such change is, "keep going, anyway." This comes in two forms: our own attitude, and the power of community. Only we can control our attitude, the direction our lives take is a personal determination that occurs every day and sometimes oftener. For some their

Shoe Leather

It was the early fifties; Rock and Roll was just in its infancy. But being a social misfit, I had not yet broken through to listening and hearing. The beat passed me by, and did so for a number of years yet. My parents were in their 60's and didn't seem to know how to encourage me to step into my classmates' culture. We were also a Methodist preacher's family and they didn't want to shake up the conservative element in the congregation. I was an only child, a straight-A student and a musician so there wasn't an incentive to become involved in another interest.

Until I happened to listen to some Elvis Presley. I still wasn't dating much and missed being with other listeners and the youth culture. But I understood "Hound Dog" and especially "Blue Suede Shoes." And I knew something was happening among my generation. It was like I was watching youth society "through a glass darkly," floating along just out of reach, and worse, beyond my real interest. I just didn't "get it." Of course, there was a great deal of sexual repression in my arrangement with the world, and that contributed strongly to my social isolation.

Then came the summer day when the three of us drove to Omaha to buy Terry a suit for his Senior year in High School. I was embarrassed as we began shopping. This was the family from the country visiting the big city for a fashionable suit of duds for their kid. After several stores I spotted a light brown double-breasted suit that I really liked. I'd never seen a double-breasted suit and it fascinated me. (Though it was itself then going out of style.) My parents didn't object so we ordered the alterations and came back later to pick up my new suit.

Shoes. What kind of shoes? Well, we passed one shoe store with a large display in the window; right on the front row was a pair I kept coming back to. This time my parents objected a little: "This will be your only dress shoe—will that work? How will you keep them clean? But your suit is brown!" I insisted in my own quiet, manipulative way, and they gave in. I became the proud owner and wearer of a pair of Blue Suede Shoes!

I got along fine with my new shoes the rest of the summer and into fall. The only group I had any social life with was my Methodist Youth Fellowship. I got lots of compliments on my new suit and blue suede shoes, and that made me very happy. Then school started and I discovered that the only decent pair of shoes I had was my blue suedes. So I wore them—every day, to work on Saturday and, of course, all day Sunday. The shoes held up fine, and I continued to be proud of them. They were some help in my new dating life, but not enough to overcome my anxieties; besides, everyone in my class I wanted to date was going steady.

Then in October the annual MYF retreat was to be held in Cozad, Nebraska, at a camp the church owned on the hills south of Cozad. As usual, I enthusiastically signed up to go; a pair of friends who had been dating decided to go.

29april2003

Snow Surprise

I was a callow but naive college freshman at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, Nebraska. I lived with my parents in the Methodist parsonage in Waverly, Nebraska, a town of about 1000 residents fifteen miles or so northeast of Lincoln. When school started in 1952 there was another young man, Boyd, who chose to room and board with us and we commuted to NWU together. He was the eldest son in a farm family in my father's former parish, Laurel, Nebraska, and we knew each other well during my High School years there. His family and the three of us in my family also became close friends. My father counseled with the Reynolds' when in 1951 they considered selling their farm and buying a promising motel operation in Abilene, Kansas. The two couples even took a trip together to Abilene to look over the motel prior to their decision to buy it and move there. When the four adults left Abilene to return to Laurel the papers had been signed and the Reynolds were in the motel business.

That is how Boyd came to live with us in Waverly in the fall of 1952; he was beginning his Sophomore year at NWU and living with us made it possible for him to continue in school, given the financial demands of his family's new venture. It was a good arrangement for all concerned. In October we received an invitation from the Reynolds to come to Abilene for Thanksgiving. We accepted the invitation, looking forward very much to all being together again.

It was Wednesday before Thanksgiving when we left Waverly for Abilene. It was cloudy, but not snowing; then as we started south we listened to the radio giving the first warnings of the possibility of a major storm spreading from the west across southern Nebraska. Of course, we did not have a television set yet so we had had no chance to listen during the day to the kind of pictorial description of what we were getting into. The danger was minimal, we decided, because the storm was not dipping into Kansas and the second half of the trip was clear. It was only a couple of hours to Kansas, we had a new car and good tires, though snow tires were not yet invented. We were four healthy adults, all drivers, it was only mid-afternoon, we had food in the car, we could stop at a motel in Beatrice if it got really bad, or we could turn around and head for home if we had to. Through all these rationalizations, it never dawned on us what we might be meeting up with in the next three hours.

We ran into snow and wind fairly quickly, but the north-south roads were still clear. Encouraged, we made a right turn into an east-west stretch about two miles long and immediately found ourselves ploughing through drifts 3 feet high and deepening, the wind howling at us with menace. soon we had to stop behind blocked cars and Dad got out to put on the chains. By the time the chains were on it was clear that we weren't going to Abilene that day. Luckily we were about 100 yards from a farmhouse. We could see lights in the windows; they were at home! Dad gunned it and pulled into the large farmyard, hoping we could find shelter there. Without the chains we wouldn't have made it a foot up the hill—on top of which was the farmhouse. Dad parked by the front door and we fairly ran into the house, the first ones there. We didn't even knock!

In the first thirty minutes fifty people staggered up the hill and into the house, their cars blocked on the highway and now becoming buried in snow. I opened the door to let the first ones in and an elderly lady collapsed into my arms as she passed out. I think that was the moment I first realized that this was not a fun outing in the snow, and that people's lives were at stake. I had never before had a person near death depending on me to give her help, almost literally saving her life; it was one of those moments of awakening that stays with you forever and changes your assumptions about being alive yourself. Fifty more yards to walk

Me and The Nebraska Sandhills Terrence C. Wright

During the summer of 1953 I was 18 years old; I am now nearing age 70, but I have vivid memories of that summer, when I lived in an old decrepit parsonage in Wood Lake, Nebraska, part of an effort to earn money to pay my way to my second year at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, Nebraska. In the spring my father, a Methodist pastor, did some research within the appointment mechanism of the Church and found that two congregations, Wood Lake and Johnstown, did not have a pastor assigned to them for the summer. All through High School I had struggled with whether I should enter the ministry after college. When Dad shared his news, both economic and vocational, I saw it as an opportunity to try my wings as a minister and to earn some college money. So I said yes to the offer and began to pack. As part of the package my parents bought me my first car—a sweet 1947 Ford—and within a few days I was on my way north and west, proud and excited.

I arrived in Ainsworth Saturday evening where I'd stay with the Johnsons for the weekend. The Johnsons were fine hosts and because they had kept their church membership in Johnstown I was able to get a lot of current information about the two churches I was to serve. After a great roast beef dinner and more conversation I excused myself and went to my room to design the services for the next day. Specifically, I was completely blank on what I might say in the two sermons. I looked through the resources Dad had given me and found a book on the disciples. That was great: 12 disciples=12 sermons. This was going to be a snap! So I stumbled and bumbled through the summer and the 12 sermons, doing a passable job in the clergy role, and found that people really liked me and my leadership.

There was one small detail that showed up right away: money. The salary was barely enough to live on, with nothing saved for school. I let it be known that I needed a job, and almost immediately a rancher spoke up; he was haying and needed some more men. He struck me as a classic rancher, boots and Stetson, pickup and all. But he was not a John Wayne; he was flexible and low-key and I decided I could work with him. The next day I found myself deep in the rolling Sandhills and part of a genuine haying crew.

There were seven men on the crew, a couple of whom I did some socializing with. I went along on a few of their escapades; I was a teetotaler at the time, but was fascinated with the style of these people—beer and loud, bragging stories. Clearly parsonage life and a year of college had not prepared me for life on the range. I slept with the crew in the bunkhouse and thoroughly enjoyed the huge ranch meals, four times a day.

My first assignment was driving a tractor, mowing the lush prairie grass. This was uneventful, except for the day when the mower cut the legs off a baby prairie chicken and I had to kill it with a wrench. This was the humane thing to do, but it turned my

The summer quickly came to an end. I met a couple of great people I would start school with in the fast-approaching fall. The two churches survived—in fact, did very well. I was sad to leave the Nebraska Sandhills behind; but I felt like a different person emerging from those two jobs. I've never forgotten the majestic hills and vales of tall grass, the sunrises and sunsets, the welcome exercise and discipline of work, and the unique people I met and got to know. I was now to return to the sophomoric delights of NWU, but this summer did an incredible job of helping me in many ways along the path toward maturity and a responsible role in the world. Me and the Nebraska Sandhills—what a delightful gift, just when it was needed.

entered seminary at the Iliff School of Theology. Again, I was quite successful, but I allowed myself to drift into a commitment to become a local pastor and went through the steps toward ordination—not the original intent. After seminary I took additional courses for three years to qualify for the Doctor of Theology degree, but never even started on a dissertation. My inappropriate hope failed me. I had again allowed myself to drift; this time toward teaching theology and philosophy at a university or seminary, a prospect which I had no drive to pursue. These flip-flops were the result of being too specific in my hopes and missing the overall context of what I was hoping for vocationally.

In 1967 our family accepted a co-pastor position at a city church in Lincoln, Nebraska, a plum of an appointment. I had decided that my hope was to be a local church pastor. In college I had decided not to do exactly that; now I embraced the task of revitalizing the local congregation, which had been such a disappointment to me all my life. My ministry was acceptable and even exciting to this local church, but the lack of commitment to a more comprehensive picture of ministry left me again frustrated with where my hopes had led me.

We had encountered the Ecumenical Institute while living in Colorado, and now its training began to reveal the possibility of a secular, comprehensive vocational style that was very appealing. So, in 1969 we moved to Chicago to live and work with the Ecumenical Institute. The lifestyle required became too much. A year later I became psychotic and woke up in a Houston hospital. After two years of struggling to overcome the hold paranoia and depression had established in my life, my fragile hope to get well turned out to be too specific to let me survive the disease, so I left, and my family followed me to Denver.

Ten years were to pass before my dilemma became real again (there were several collapses during this time) and I had to make a change. I had become President of my firm, but my specific vision for my job was opposite to that of the other owners and I resigned at their request. I started four different companies, seeing myself as an entrepreneur; none succeeded. In my current effort I am hoping that my writing ability will earn me a minor income, and so far it has. My vocational hope is being fulfilled, now that I have retired from “work” and have abandoned the specific “job” mentality of succeeding in someone else’s eyes.

The hope I am allowing myself to experience now is disarmed; it has been scaled down from a wish list of specifics to a stance, or attitude, that is a doable alternative to despair. Demands are not the prime motivation, but from a stance of real retirement I simply work at what I can do: which is writing a fairly good product of poetry and prose, and self-publishing one or two items at a time. My knowing and doing are comprehensive and inclusive, but on a far different scale than ever before. My hope is simply to find meaning and broadcast it. And what I find is a real happiness the old, perpetually dissatisfied hope could never achieve.

—TCWright, October 15, 2004

AUTUMNAL MEDLEY:

POEMS AND STORIES

Biographical Notes

Terrence C Wright is a retired Architect, born in Nebraska, raised in Kansas; he has a degree of BS in Architectural Engineering and a Masters degree from a Methodist seminary. He has been writing poetry and essays seriously since 1988; and is a member of Columbine Poets, Inc., in Denver, Colorado. He has self-published a chapbook of writings annually since 1989. His writing method is to observe some aspect of life and to respond with insights into the depth meaning to be found in that experience.