



# Poems

*Midwinter Musings*

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**Unique Gift**

Krinkles  
at the corners  
of the mouth  
a sign  
of pleasure  
imminent-- --  
slowly  
transforming  
the countenance  
with a  
radiant  
yes  
dawn  
breaks  
burdens  
seem  
lighter  
for both  
of us  
the bond  
real and  
precious  
when we part  
joy remains  
the keynote  
of the day.

First Prize  
SMILE  
Fall 1995

## Appraisal

Midday  
approaches.  
A third of my  
working hours  
gone by  
the board.  
A dent in  
my list  
of to-does;  
a fresh  
perspective  
on the balance.  
A new image  
of myself  
as creative  
and dependable;  
a refined  
readiness  
to do the  
afternoon.

### Mostly Up For Grabs

There is  
no such thing  
as a day  
without  
risk, for  
we live in  
a universe  
that is  
dynamic  
pluralistic  
interrelated  
and whose  
complexity  
we can  
seldom  
completely  
outguess.

### Patterns of Default

To participate  
in head to head  
discussion  
with it's whirls  
and stacks  
of thoughts  
predictions  
and feelings  
may at times  
excede  
what I can  
tolerate  
with a  
fragile  
psyche and  
the threat  
of unwellness.  
Memory goes  
first, then  
errors of  
cognition,  
then unwelcome  
often inappropriate  
feelings and  
perceptions.  
Soon my  
attention  
shifts inward  
away from  
a painful  
exterior,  
and thoughts  
go elsewhere  
leaving the  
shell of  
appearance:  
'hiding becomes  
the option  
of the day.

## **Only a Moment to Decide**

Each second  
in today's world  
is a test of  
one's civility  
and a struggle  
to find a  
civil way  
to approach  
living and its  
surprises.  
One asks,  
"Do I will  
the being  
of others--  
people  
places  
things--  
or their  
non-being?"  
Do I greet  
new approaches  
with words and  
actions that  
affirm rather  
than deny  
their real  
presence?  
Can I greet  
challenges  
with a "Yes"  
before I  
formulate  
the shape  
of my perhaps  
necessary "No"?  
It may be that  
indicatives are  
better friends  
than imperatives.

### **Inventing the Way**

Twinges of  
nerve endings  
over my whole  
body signal  
tiredness  
and a need  
for rest.  
It is not the  
tired of a  
physical  
laborer  
nor the  
mental exertion  
of a court  
stenographer  
nor the monotony  
of thrust  
and counter-  
thrust that  
a person in  
sales has  
perpetually  
to do. Today  
I have been  
like a chef  
choosing and  
processing  
the ingredients  
of a mouth-  
watering meal,  
writing the recipe  
as I go,  
taste-testing  
toward the  
excellence of  
things to come.

### Life's Little Losses

We lose  
something  
as we sink  
smoothly  
from the  
action of  
day to the  
surrendering  
sleep of  
night and we  
grieve the  
loss as though  
it were a love  
gone forever:  
in fact the  
day we lived  
will never  
return; our  
day's achievements  
are for better,  
for worse, and  
we name them  
to ourselves  
as we go "poof"  
and watch  
them sail away;  
but we grieve  
most of all,  
not without  
fear, as we  
yield the fullness  
of our life-long  
consciousness  
to the fragile  
assumption  
that it will  
return.



### Urban Avalon

Rain  
cools  
the parking  
lot and  
softens  
new grass  
and gives  
the city  
the aura  
of a  
misty  
isle.

## A Surprising Standoff

Would I choose  
wealth  
if wealth is  
offered  
or would I  
decide that  
life on the  
margin of  
poverty is  
my calling?

Is it possible to  
accept wealth  
and manage it  
in such a way  
that it does not  
interfere with  
the values  
of poverty?

The operational  
side of the  
question is moot  
since no one  
has assured me  
of wealth  
and the prospect  
is still a dream.

The spiritual  
side of the  
question rumbles  
ominously with  
a challenge to  
integrity, hinting  
that wealth and  
poverty are equally  
problematic.

**Paradigm for Winning**

This society  
teems with  
opportunities  
to observe  
or participate  
in hurtful  
unnecessary  
competition  
with others  
or with ourselves  
which springs  
from self-doubt  
and the drive  
to win and  
defeat others,  
no matter the cost.

We honor  
winners and  
ignore losers  
(which usually  
outnumber  
winners by a  
large margin.)  
We search  
for the best  
to enhance  
personal  
survival, and  
losing becomes  
the excuse for  
a paradigm  
of defeat.

### War's Rationales

Ethical thought has carefully screened the notion of a "just war" and for some has arrived at a rational construct to affirm the killing, torture razing and even genocide of war as a moral activity in certain odd situations.

Others focus on the threat of the moment and do not bother with the questions of justice.

Still others see the economic and political advantages of war and make pragmatic decisions about necessary action.

A critical few say no and face the dilemma of how peace is kept without war.

***Send or Save***

The flow  
and flutter  
of my  
paper life  
creates  
mounds of  
information  
I want to  
send or save;  
file cabinets  
and computers  
accomodate  
either decision  
as soon as a  
decision  
is made.  
It is commonplace  
to fall behind  
in this pestering  
decision-making  
process until  
the mounds are  
months-old  
piles of stale  
options, their  
possibilities  
dead and  
gone by;  
but each option  
still requires  
a decision  
to determine  
its belated fate  
and the mounds  
grow dusty  
in the priority  
of things.

### Proportional Response

Fleck of  
blood--  
my blood--  
signals  
a collision  
of my skin  
and some foreign  
object  
source of the  
collision not  
known  
others this day  
with terminal  
bleeding.  
My response:  
panic over  
an insignificant,  
puny invasion  
of my relatively  
intact envelope.

### Stunted Verdict

Anything is  
beautiful  
in its own  
context  
though we  
usually name  
it so only  
within the  
context  
from which  
we view it  
leaving the  
bottom line  
open to ugly  
and shutting  
the door on  
half the  
realities  
of the  
planet.

FATHER GREW UP

My father  
had a  
wooden  
paddle  
he invented  
for my  
brother  
and other  
siblings  
that was used  
liberally  
to give vent  
to his  
stern code  
but he  
never used it  
on me!  
I think  
he came to  
know that  
using it  
didn't work  
to change  
behavior  
so with me  
he tried  
love.



### Strangers at Christmas

These days  
strangers  
gather  
at Christmas.  
"Family" a  
paradigm  
from earlier  
times  
serving to  
reinforce  
the bond  
of kinship  
and religion  
most fruitful  
at Christmas.

"Family" is  
no longer  
the monolithic  
image it  
once was  
and "religion"  
has gone  
secular  
for millions,  
whether  
they know it  
or not.

So the two  
have loosed  
their deepest  
hold on  
each other  
and the  
result is  
holiday  
by rote.

**Search for Identity**

It is not  
the same  
earth  
I knew  
as a child  
when all  
was explained  
and taken  
for granted,  
surety and  
progress  
assured as  
birthright;  
blind to  
chaos then,  
comfortable  
in our denials  
of the  
woundedness  
of earth  
and self.  
Now we  
know of the  
vulnerability  
of self and  
earth and of  
powers and  
potentials  
making  
claims  
before our eyes  
and we  
struggle to  
know and do  
the much more  
intimate mind  
of Mystery.

**Tree**

In the name  
of the economy  
cut that tree!  
Ignore its rings  
and its name,  
its willingness  
to be a place  
of roundevous  
for lovers  
and old men  
puffing pipes;  
for it cannot  
complain or  
voice its chagrin  
at leaving  
its cousins  
and becoming  
part of  
someone's  
utilitarian  
structure.

Fairies  
danced  
around  
the tree  
also  
before it  
was noticed  
and marked  
as a  
doom-piece  
in someone's  
stategic plan.

The tree  
will not  
be remembered  
after time  
has eased  
the grief  
of letting  
it go;  
except that  
each piece  
of paper, each  
pair of  
chopsticks  
will tend to  
say, "hello."

## Mail Train

As a diminutive boy in a very small town I would go often to the century-old train station to wait eagerly for the daily arrival of the huge steam engine and its complement of passengers, freight, and mail.	A surge of excitement at the first faint hint of a distant whistle. Soon after, the train would arrive with an overwhelming roar, accompanied by clouds of hissing steam and the joyous clang of a heralding bell. The world outside arrived with that train every day; then it was taken away again with a choo-choo roar, a clanging bell, and a shrilling whistle.	None knew, I'm sure, that I had been visited by my own future: an urban technology far more interesting to me than familiar rural images. But it was just not time yet for the simple logic of migration, so I would return to school and to play, waiting patiently for the next faint, familiar whistle to remind me of my tentative imaginings of another world waiting for me.
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### A Garden Rake

    Hanging with  
    tense anticipation  
    on its hook  
    in the garage,  
    the season  
    progressing  
    toward its  
    time of  
    most noble  
    calling  
    as Preparer  
    of the earth,  
    the rake  
    expects an  
    imminent request  
    for it to be  
    of use,  
    and rehearses  
    daily the  
    excitment  
    of knowing  
    there is no  
    substitute  
    for the care  
    it alone  
    can give.

## Lifestyle Simplification

Sophistication  
swirls around  
the tables,  
a sparkle  
in the sleepy  
eyes of old,  
decomposing  
warriors  
hearing words  
that freed them  
decades ago;  
spine-tingling  
insights spring  
from nothing  
as the imperative  
new is rehearsed  
in resonance  
with born-again  
history.

Our detachment  
does not preclude  
our enjoyment  
of life--its  
pleasures claim us  
just as before,  
maybe more  
for being distanced  
from fun's guilt,  
a position of  
astonishing irony  
that life should  
deal us  
this offensive  
new permission  
to defeat the  
iron anchor  
of being possessed  
by.

### **Quick-change Artistry**

Those who  
have lost  
the sense of a  
secure future  
expected  
from their  
workplace  
know that  
in this  
decade and  
those to come  
job surety  
has been  
discarded  
or become  
an extremely  
fragile part  
of everyone's  
experience,  
with compassion  
relegated to the  
bottom priority.

As civility  
continues to  
disintegrate,  
respect and  
reward go  
with it,  
loyalty is not  
noticed or is  
shoved aside,  
certainty is  
relative  
and reduced  
to a day  
at a time.  
Raise your head  
and be joyful  
at each day's  
contributions.

### **Moon Thoughts**

Tonight  
the earth's shadow  
took a bite  
out of the  
full moon  
as the earth  
slid discreetly  
between moon  
and sun--  
its shadow  
threatening  
to engulf the  
shimmering  
moon in its  
entirety,  
just as  
voracious people  
choose to steal  
the whole show,  
unable to honor  
the others' role  
in this pluralistic  
not-yet-civil  
global society.  
Why do we  
seem to favor  
our ability to  
cast shadows  
when we have  
so many of the  
skills and  
sympathies  
that can  
make bright  
our most  
soulful  
relationships?



### **Crossing the Bar**

The man exuded bitterness, the  
lingering aroma of knowing the truth.  
With each moment he seemed ready  
to accelerate into flight,  
the more distance the better,  
sweet speed nestling in his mind,  
his focus on the loud presence  
of the whole earth  
for the first time in his life.  
He had never gone to the moon  
and looked back on Earth,  
never touched the flame  
that consciousness brings  
with that kind of leap.

Like white chocolate and the  
savory bouganvilla it was  
a life scent that he had never  
come close to. He was  
more nearly ready than we thought:  
his energy settled to a  
whisper of hope, a smooth touch  
of reality and nearness, intensity  
of lilacs fading, his running  
no longer producing a blur but now  
the strong awareness of this new  
dimension of life.

### **Rekindling the Web**

The potential  
of this week  
has largely  
been realized,  
for many of  
the aspects  
of union  
were tapped  
and nurtured  
by each of us  
as we talked,  
laughed, ate  
and absorbed  
the family  
matrix. Like  
any exercise  
the re-union  
set people  
aglow with  
activated  
relationships  
and a reminder  
of who  
each of us  
is.

### **Double Message**

My life is  
not my own  
for I am  
constantly  
reminded  
and summoned  
to obligation  
formed in my  
participation  
with the world;  
yet I am left  
with the  
reality that  
only I can  
decide what is  
the isness  
of the moment  
and what  
my response  
will be.

### Window on Magic

Awake again. Not my  
bed. Lying in an arena of  
crisp, clean whiteness.  
Bathed in serious light; it must be  
borrowed from the sun. Masked  
technicians bustle about.  
This is clearly a hospital  
and I am its intent.  
Lie still and listen to its song.

All the accouterments  
of healing;  
all the potential  
of death

A tiny incision in my lower body:  
A long, thin tube begins its journey  
to the wounded center. I know this  
life-giving procedure from  
idle conversation;  
now I give it my anxious yes.

Skills and confidence guide the tube slowly  
within the chosen vessel. It passes  
through the body cavity as though  
it knows the way; it inches along  
until it enters the faltering heart.  
A cheer sounds as the tube appears  
on the monitor precisely as intended.

Work on the vessels of the damaged heart  
begins: clearing sixty years of careless  
blockage, freeing blood to rush into  
the dry channels and starving muscles  
previously ignored. The heart  
murmurs its thanks.

This patient, deliberate loving of the body  
is interrupted without warning:  
The heart abruptly changes pace and  
loses its regular beat.

I feel its failure like the  
break in stride of a fine thoroughbred.

Cries of alarm around the table; no panic.  
Each person shifts calmly to the new challenge.  
Electric plates are put in place  
to shock the organ back to a regular  
rhythm. The plates pulse evenly until  
a severe jolt racks my body--then another  
even stronger.

With truancy forgiven  
the heart returns to its primordial task of  
caring for the body's blood.  
Another cheer at this victory and the team  
smoothly returns to their work  
opening the blocked vessels.

So this is a heart attack! So quickly do  
life-changes occur. Butterflies emerge  
from fuzzy worms and take to their wings.  
There is no going back. A new sense of  
vulnerability enters the picture: weakened  
heart, more medication, radical diet, exercise...  
The odds depend on how  
quickly I turn to face this new life.

It could have ended tonight.  
It did not.

And there is tomorrow's possibility.

### **Moment's Heritage**

Dance  
the dozens  
of ways  
there are  
to dance  
filling life  
with motion  
and emotion  
creating  
the story  
of the moment  
to last a  
thousand  
years,  
body telling  
the tale  
capturing  
everything  
that was  
and is  
and will be,  
before  
the hour comes  
that knows  
your name.

- - acknowledging  
*The Summer Tree*  
Guy Gavriel Kay