



The Other Side
of Midnight

Sarah H. Buss

A Poet for the Ecology of the Soul

The Other Side of Midnight, Sarah Buss's soul-felt book of poetry and essays, takes the reader from tears to smiles as we feel like a fly on the wall observing Sarah's journey through life, love, loss, anger, joy and, most of all, her progression toward growth and wholeness. The authenticity of her voice comes through especially clearly when she writes about her West Texas roots. The book leaves us feeling grateful to have shared in the deep nuances of another's life and to be a part of humanity with all its ups and downs.

—Pam Autrey, BA, MLS, PhD, University of Texas

Sarah's poetry renditions are totally captivating. She truly inspires the reader to feel the depth of his or her own emotions. A performing poet for the ecology of the soul, Sarah will help you traverse the memories you want to conserve while releasing others to the wildness of your own inner landscape.

—Robin Nygumburo Bridges, M. Ed., LCPC,
author of upcoming book

Moose Medicine: Nature, Soul, and Healing in Montana

Sarah's work is rich, wide-ranging, and very personal. She has an intuitive sense of rhyme, both internal and end-line, but also has given herself the freedom to use that poetic convention only when it makes sense relative to the content /statement of her poems. She uses startlingly strong, vivid images drawn from her West Texas home-place and effectively uses the dialect from her childhood. The pathos of Sarah's experiences of loss is palpable, as is her extravagant joy over the gifts that bless her life. While this work represents Sarah's unique journey, it also depicts in many ways the journey of all women. I see this work as the "song of a woman who has come through" (after D. H. Lawrence).

—Marilyn R. Crocker, Ed. D.
Educational and Organizational Development Consultant

The Other Side of Midnight is an invitation to set aside moments of solitude and allow reflections upon life's quirks and turns to wash over you in a waterfall of delight. Using a wry sense of humor, Sarah Buss writes sensitively about traumas others fear to mention. Her poetry evokes the mystery of desert spaces and star-filled skies.

—LiDoña Wagner
Author, PILGRIMAGE Wonder Encounter Witness

Sarah has given of herself in sharing the pain, joy and hope embedded in this poetry. I was stopped dead in my "technical tracks" from the reading of the first poem and could not stop till I had read every line. This book is a great testament to the human spirit we share as it takes us back into our own childhoods, through our family evolutions, the maturation of our children, our struggles across planet earth and our wonderment at being here in the present moment.

—M. George Walters
Resurgence Publishing Corporation

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the Soul

A large, stylized signature of Sarah H. Buss. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first letter is a large, elegant 'S' that curves around and under itself. The rest of the name 'arah' is written in a smaller, more compact cursive script, following the curve of the 'S'. The signature is positioned below the author's name and subtitle.

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The Other Side of Midnight

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Author Photos: © Harriet Holleman Photography
Cover Photos: Sarah H. Buss
Cover Design: Rebecca Bretz
Text Design: George Anne Byfield

Published by: stonecross publishing

Printed in the United States of America
By Ginny's Printing in Austin, TX

Dedication

To

all of us

on our life's

Journey of Healing

especially

my children

Daughter

Metta Karuna
Margaret Elizabeth Buss

and

Son

Lindsey Fredric Buss

Acknowledgements

The three primary editors of *The Other Side of Midnight*, did a good job of editing my poems without trying to edit me, a small town country girl who had served all around the world. That required a lot of patience and compassion.

Jane Chamberlain, a yoga classmate and owner of Pangloss Publishing, was the first of my editors. She sat at my computer to help clean up a lot of my one-room school house and small-town education.

Then I sought the help of two long-ago colleagues that I have known for almost 50 years. They rose to the occasion. Marilyn Crocker brought to bear her Smith College, Harvard and Boston University education and went over the manuscript in great detail. Ultimately she read the poems aloud to review every aspect and perspective before returning the gently marked-up hard copy to me.

LiDona Wagner gave generously of her skills as an artist with an advanced degree in non-fiction writing. She did a lot of hand holding at the computer as we dialogued to incorporate her electronic notes to my satisfaction, as physical limitations made that difficult for me. Then she went a second round with me to incorporate Marilyn's notes. Her recently published beautiful book, *Pilgrimage*, made her more than qualified as she faithfully guided me until my document was near completion.

Feedback and guidance from others gave me the support I needed to go through the process of publishing a book of poetry. Though there were many, most noteworthy were Pam Autrey, Robyn Bridges, Mary Ann Coates, Terry Sherrell, George Anne Byfield, Rebecca Bretz and George Walters. While I will not mention them by name, I must make note of those in the healing profession who have treated and supported me along the way.

My son Lindsey Buss did not let the process get too far without making an imprint: Lindsey, an attorney by training and experience and now a not-for-profit president and CEO, “polished” the manuscript with his editorial skill. His affirmation gave me the courage to move forward to the final product. What more could a mother ask for!

Author's Introduction
The Other Side of Midnight

This collection is a book of poetry and a few essays, but the reader might find it useful to approach the book as she would a novel. Of course one will need to read between the lines and perhaps add a transitional paragraph or two.

My poems were written as they came to me over a span of 22 years. I have organized them in this book to reflect my sense of journey over a lifetime. Read on, following the path of your own heart.

Love and kindness,
Sarah

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The Other Side of Midnight



Prologue

Poetic Isn't It?

Through poetry, I am
able to get said
Precisely what I have to say.
Whether or not
Someone "gets it" is
entirely beside the point.

A good poem takes
us wherever it is
We need to go, and
allows us to
Unwind our own
life entanglement.

I. The Mystery of Being



Death's Door

12/4 I'm 64

Thank you dear God for
my breath, my death,
The cycle of life.

Death's Door

Death doth knock
at its own door
Seeking consolation
and wisdom.

It doth not run
away
Nor fear
its own demise

But embraces what
it doth not understand,
And holds fast to the promise
of yet another land.

Departed

Death, where is thy
sting? Holy One
Doth take me
home again.

Home where those
abide, to love
And kind me. Eternal
mist subsides.
The heavens
open wide.

Forgotten not those
who hold me dear:
Capture yet that moment which
brings a lonesome tear.

Life will console
thee too. Remember
Well, I am with
thee. Still.

Desert Shadow Light

The shadow light
of a red rock
mourning
weeps tears,
from an ancient
not yet past.

Prickly pear wounds
of yester years,
bleed . . .
like cactus fruit
ripe beyond
its time.

A lone coyote calls
forth the
solitary
journey of a
dark, still
silent night.

Kindly canyon arms
wrap themselves
'round,
gently holding,
healing, do
no harm.

Sifted desert sands
from eon
ocean waters
soothe those who
barefoot walk
their path.

A patient setting sun
holds long
its light,
does not desert
the lonely
shadowed night.

I. The Mystery of Being

The Untouchable



Mother-Loved

My Momma made me
custard pudding,
Not quite boiled up
on the stove
For a long period
of time,
Stirred constantly with
a wooden spoon,
Vanilla added for
just the right touch,
Then refrigerator
cooled
While the not-much-left-
to-be-scraped pot
Was licked clean
right down
to the wooden spoon.

But there was always
enough in the fridge,
Often even enough
left over for
the freezer tray
For the best icy
ice cream,
Stirred and restirred
'til frozen,
Specially for
little Sarah
who loved it best,
Though others sometimes
got a share.
Mother-loved—
Nurtured.

Then suddenly one day—
There was no more:
No more
Custard Pudding,
No more
Mother-love.

Near Death Experience

My mother died
at an early
Age—both hers
and mine.

So I am never
far away from
Death—both hers—
and mine.

Pray for Sleep

I awaken
in the night
Only to remember
the truth of it:
“My mother . . . is dead.”

Still disbelieving,
I hope for
Her return, dreaming
a departure promise:
“I will soon be home.”

Only yesterday
I was safe
In the arms
of her anticipation,
My expectation.

Now I wish,
if only it
Were yesterday
and this was but
A terrible nightmare.

Did my fear of it
make it so?
Am I somehow
to blame, and
My mother feels the same?

Pray for sleep
now, that this
Heartfelt pain might
slumber, and dream
It all, a nightmare.

The Death Watch

As though it were
yesterday, I remember
my mother's passing. I
was a child hybrid,
baptized Presbyterian,
raised Methodist in a
small West Texas town.
Sitting with the dead
was a powerful part
of the death ritual:
around the clock
in twos until
Mother was buried. It was
the same a year later when
my uncle died, and
a month after that
when a cousin passed.
There was comfort in the vigil.

With the short distances
and tight knit communities
this was not a difficult
ritual to implement. It
was assumed, and the
burials in my family
were always within
a day or two.

I would like to ask
it for my own passing,
except that as a practical
matter, time and distance
might make it prohibitive.

To lie alone in life
is one thing; to
lie alone in death
is quite another.

The Untouchable

After Mother died,
it seemed like I was untouchable.
Everyone went inside
to meet her own grief
No one touched anyone,
least of all me.

Daddy's sisters were mostly talking;
Mother's twin disappeared.
Grandmother hid her tears,
from the little I saw of her.
As for me, I just stood there,
the only child in sight.

Children didn't go
to funerals
Unless it was their
own Mother's.
They stayed in school,
that was the rule.

Everyone was too far up
to reach down and touch me,
And too far away
to find me in the night,
Or too far gone
to risk it.

By the time everyone came to,
I was gone
So far inside myself,
it was the only thing I knew.
Yes, I had lost my touch,
just like all the rest.

The First Thanksgiving

The first Thanksgiving
after my mother's death,
one week to the day
after her passing,
was a difficult one.
We, of course, could not
be left alone to
cry our tears: a
47-year-old rancher
who always made the
dressing anyway, his teenage
son of 15, and myself,
his soon to be
10-year-old daughter.
So we saddened the table
of my father's sister
and her full-fledged family.
She was the one of
the "Texas pecan pie vintage,"
a tradition I carried forward
into my own adulthood,
perhaps because it was

the comfort food of that
so sad Thanksgiving:
the one when we
struggled to fight back
our tears to get
through the meal preparation,
feast, and cleanup without as it were,
“breaking down”
like poorly digested food,
coming apart in pieces.
The sadness, the kitchen,
the dining room, and my aunt
is what I remember about
The First Thanksgiving.

That year, we had Christmas
at home, all to ourselves.
My Daddy
was not going to go
through that Thanksgiving again.
No onlookers at our sadness
somehow made it easier.

I Believe in Santa Claus

Until I was
ten years old,
I believed in
Santa Claus.

Then Mother died
and Daddy told,
He was not
Santa Claus.

“Thank Katherine Landon,”
he said, for
All those clothes
well made.

Tiny bits and pieces
from family scraps of cloth,
Turned, like magic, into
Big-Doll-Baby clothes.

T’was the hands of love and kindness
of my mom and Katherine too:
“I believe in Santa Claus
and a merry wish come true,

My. . . mommy lives
forever. . . ,
Nightgown softness,
in baby-doll pajamas.”

Reincarnation Mom Remembered

“A laughing smile
had she
Truly the aura
of a woman free.

Bigger
than life,
She could stand more than
a little strife.

Yes, off the handle
she could fly
Quite without
even half a try.”

So it is
that I remember mother
In days gone by
with but the memory of a child.

Despite floods of tears
and memory faded by years and years
I long to behold
the woman who once longed for me.

If only I could reach
back in time
And touch the hand
that once held mine.

Instead I only know
that her once loved
Has slipped away
into no love at all,

And that the one
 who lived in solitude
Has now become
 the soldier of despair.

What a shame it is
 that life is wasted thus;
It was not her intention
 to erase her life nor to destroy mine.

Perhaps it is time to see
 that life goes on despite Mom and me,
To pick up the torch which she once bore
 and go forth now, to fret no more.

“A laughing smile
 as one so free,
Bigger than life
 loving all of me,
And fearing not, to fly,
 nor simply just to be.”

Nine Years Old

When I was
 nine years old
My mother died
 with little
Warning.

So it was
 inevitable
That I would
 easily slip
Into Iain's shoes,

Recalling my
 feelings into
The now, as
 though it were
Yesterday.

Prelude

On Feb 1, 2003 the Columbia space shuttle blew up. On board was a U.S. Navy captain and flight surgeon named Laurel Clark. I was told that some time after the explosion of the Columbia, eight-year-old Iain Clark and his dad, Dr. Jon Clark, left Florida and the worst moments of their lives and headed home to Clear Lake, Texas. As they crossed the Texas/Louisiana border, Iain began waving. "What are you doing?" his Dad asked. "I'm waving goodbye to Mommy. I just felt her."

Goodbye Mommy A Postlude Poem Columbia

Iain didn't say,
"Mommy left
From Texas."

He didn't say,
"I think
Mommy's out there."

He didn't say,
"I see
Mommy's aura."

No. Iain said,
"I FELT,
Mommy."

And I know
EXACTLY what
He was
talking about.

But, I didn't
know it
Until I was
Fifty-nine years old.

Iain's like his
Mommy: light-years
Ahead of the
rest of us.

Permission Given

Mother, when you are ready
to cross over,
I release you
in loving kindness,
and open my heart
to receive your presence
from the Other World.

Counting Birthdays

Some people say
 “I don’t count
 my birthdays anymore.”
This is what I think about
 counting birthdays:

I count every last
 one of them,
As long as I can
 count that high.

And I subtract
 to see how much
 longer I have lived,
Than my Father . . .
Than my Brother . . .
Than my Mother—
 the longest of all.

One by one,
 birthday by birthday,
I learn a little
 something more
About
 GRATITUDE.

Postlude

Yes, I count birthdays,
Even, if necessary,
 only in private.

Mother's Day A Crazy Custom

In the small West Texas town where I grew up, Mother's Day was a grand go-to-church occasion. Anticipation would build as the day approached. And we all knew the custom: if your mother was dead you wore white flowers, if she was alive you wore red. It was a crazy custom.

I guarantee you, whoever thought it up was not thinking of motherless children. As if the fact of life and death were not enough, we had to raise a red flag—or a white one—as the case may be.

My sense of dread always set in a good week beforehand. Would I wear white flowers, or would my father make me wear red in honor of my stepmother? Or perhaps none at all. Just pretend and ignore the reality. Or maybe I should wear pink, with more white than red in it.

Certainly I knew that neither red nor pink nor “none at all” would do for me. But it was a catch-22: I knew if I wore white, as I did from the age of nine, I would be the only one among my friends to do so. The strange thing was that it made me feel embarrassed rather than just plain sad—as though it were my fault. So on every Mother's Day until I was grown, I wore the white badge of guilt on Mother's Day. What a crazy custom!

Postscript #1:

I suspect that no matter how a parent dies, we always find a way to feel guilty about it: as though we were the personal god of it all.

Postscript #2:

Years later, I think that this was somewhat how my children must have felt the Christmas Day they spent with relatives—

but without their mother and father, who were halfway around the world, not even within reach of a phone call: just plain embarrassed to be under the gaze of relatives who saw the neglectful truth of it. Thus they took the lonesome sadness to an even deeper level, with perhaps a dash of irrational guilt thrown in, as though they were somehow to blame.

One of a Kind

My father at the age of 30 had at last found the “love of his life”—the then-22-year-old woman who would one day be my mother. I’m sure he intended a nice diamond engagement ring for my mother, depending on what the bank would be willing to lend him.

It was during the depression—1930. He was still deeply in debt. When my father was 19 his father had died, and as the youngest of six children and the only boy, my father returned home from military academy to run the ranch. Then during the depression he had had to sell half the ranch to save the other half. So by 1930 the bank knew him well.

Even so, it must have taken a great deal of courage to walk into that bank again, to ask for money for something as seemingly superfluous as a diamond ring. And sure enough, when he left the bank that day he did not have a dime more in his pocket than when he had gone in.

But the grin on his face I would love to have seen, as he fingered the two-carat diamond ring that was to become my mother’s. It being the depression, some unfortunate soul had had to

surrender the two-carat ring—an almost flawless diamond, set in a platinum mount surrounded by tiny diamonds, and a matching wedding band of still-more-tiny diamonds.

This ring became the awe-inspiring ring and envy of all my mother's friends and relatives. In those days most of them had probably never seen such a ring, let alone owned one. Even in later years when after the oil boom most of them were dripping in diamonds, none had a diamond quite so beautiful as that ring.

My cousin loves to tell the story of when she and my mother were in the chicken yard at the ranch. Mother had pointed out the incongruity, as in preparation for dinner she wrung a chicken's neck with that two-carat-diamonded hand of hers. She rarely took the ring off as evidenced by the numerous chips in the diamond.

But that was then and this is now, for when the love of my father's life died at the age of 39, only 17 years after their marriage, that ring became her nine-year-old daughter's.

As I wear the ring, the only diamond I have or will probably ever own, family members still hold my hand, and gaze in awe at the one-of-a-kind ring on my finger; as we all,

in silence,

remember,

the ONE-OF-A-KIND WOMAN who wore it.

I. The Mystery of Being

The Country Girl



I Have A Curl

Hilltop view
and lost horizons
Ne'er a dream
come true,
'Cause I have a curl,
I'm too little and
just a girl.

Oceans beckon
skyward blue
How I long
for something new,
But I have a curl,
I'm too little
and just a girl.

Not one hand
to steady me
Nor a single crumb
along my path,
Since I have a curl, and
I'm too little
and just a girl.

Goin' Visitin'

When I was just a little kid,
I used to go visit my Aunt Bobbie and My Unca Notley
on their ranch West of the Pecos.
Unca Notley used to take me places,
and to do fun things.

Once he put me
upside a fence in white real painter overalls
and handed me a paintbrush with real paint
and told me to go to it.
I weren't more than three at the time.
The paint was real barn red,
like his barn and all of his sheds and fences.
I went to paintin' like I had good sense,
I felt bigger than my britches
and twice my size.
I weren't no little girl with just a curl,
I was big as life
and could reach what felt like three boards up
on that fence post.
If I had died and gone to heaven,
life couldn't have been any better.

'cept maybe once when
ol' Juan took me ridin' in that flat bed wheelbarrow.
Well actually it was more than once.
At Aunt Bobbie's and Unca Notley's
it felt like all the time.
It probably was too,
I was always King of the Mountain at Unca Notley's,
except when I was Queen for a Day.

Days were really somethin' there.
They started by me and my Unca Notley
 goin' up to the ranch-hands' house to eat breakfast.
It was clean enough that
 we could eat off the floor.
But we didn't. We sat right up to the long table
 with benches—right up there beside the hired hands.
It's a wonder I could reach my plate,
 but I guess somehow I did.

Then out would come those hot biscuits,
 straight from the woodstove oven, big and thick
 and just heavy enough to stick to your ribs
 real good.
But that weren't all. There was always a big can of
 Br'er Rabbit syrup or maybe some Blackstrap Molasses.
I can taste it now,
 poured all over those hot biscuits.
It makes my mouth water just thinkin' about it.
 (God . . . it was good.)

And the smell of black coffee in tin cups.
I sure weren't pregnant then,
 which in later years was a condition diagnosed
 by messing up the smell of good black coffee,
No I wasn't pregnant then, but I sure felt like it.
Bigger than life, I knew I could do great things even then,
You know, like paintin' the fence or somethin'.

Then after feeling full and satisfied
 from plannin' the day around the long table
 laid with the red-print oilcloth
 and spread with all you could eat 'til we was plum full,
We, me and my Unca Notley, strolled . . . back up to the house
 with the three-foot adobe walls
 where by now my Aunt Bobbie would be up.

As I sat on the floor all day playing with bottle-top toys,
I never noticed that my Unca Notley
had gone back out to do the real work.
I guess I figured it was all done,
So I sat in the middle of the big thick living room rug,
while Aunt Bobbie dust-mopped around its edges.
Maybe sometime I even helped,
feeling like a little lady in a big house.

Then I'd go back to my toys.
It was just the best collection you would ever want to see,
Little cars and special trucks,
and baby dolls and such stuff.
But the best of all were those bottle-top toys and ol' tins,
Great for makin' up and thinkin' big and doin' good.

And when I'd finished playin'
They went back in boxes,
And into cabinets with the most amazin' free-slidin' doors,
that lined the twenty-foot pantry walls
and the garage that connected at the pantry door as well,
Which itself was so clean and smelled so good
it could have been a bedroom.
Unca Notley was that way,
neat and clean and orderly.

Why you should have seen his tools—all over the whole ranch
lined up like tin soldiers,
Every size from big to small,
right there on the wall,
And bins of nails, each
labeled by its own, tacked right there on front,
so any fool could see.

Years later when the ranch had been otherwise stripped bare

I took one of those old bins home
and put it in my barn,
Knowing I would never be able
to keep the right darn nails in the thing,
But it didn't matter much
because I could still look at that bin
and remember my Unca Notley.

It's fun, remembering being little like that
and being made over and cared for.
It's never been quite the same since,
Not that it should be mind you,
but nonetheless
I can't help noticin' it hasn't been.
But my . . . how glad I am
that it once was
And that I had an Aunt Bobbie
and an Unca Notley.

Auntie Mae

"Today is Monday, tomorrow is Tuesday,
the next day is Wednesday,
The week's half gone
and I haven't gotten a thing done,"
So Auntie Mae
used to say.

Nothin' To Do On a Beautiful Day in October

Me and Junior
didn't have nothin' to do,
on a Beautiful Day in October,
So we were just foolin' around,
Me and Junior.

Now let me tell you, about
Junior.

Junior was my age, only
smaller. His dad worked for
my dad on the ranch where
I grew up.

He was tough as nails
and the only really playmate
I ever had.

Junior would go barefoot
across the sticker patch
in winter time
And chew tobacco and
smoke discarded cigarette butts
(before he was five).

Nonetheless, Junior and me were a twosome
He sum and me sum
made up a grand total
of a heap of trouble.

Now don't misunderstand me,
we didn't intentionally go out to make
a lot of trouble (we were basically good kids),
It just sort of, came naturally.
We could get in a heap
of trouble without even
half tryin'.

One day we—Me and Junior—were up to our usual
nothin' to do on a beautiful day in October
When we came upon a not-so-recently-used
and somewhat abandoned
outhouse.

But it wasn't totally without its use,
it still had plenty of possibility:
Deep below were the numerous
remains of unread pages
And up top was a perfectly good
but not quite new
Sears Catalogue.

Now we—Me and Junior—
weren't up to nothing no good—
We just didn't have
nothin' to do,
nothin' else, that is 'cept
Checkin' out the outhouse.

However, Junior just happened
to have a book of matches
on him.
He needed 'em, of course,
in case he came upon a
discarded cigarette butt.

But they came in handy otherwise,
and in this case seemed to
fit right “in the picture.”
It just sort of came naturally
to Junior—the frequenter of his own outhouse—
To bring forth this book of matches
he had on him.

Now mind you, we weren't up
to nothin' no good,
But matches are, after all, for strikin',
so 'course Junior struck one
and dropped it in the hole.
Followed by another one or two
or three,
Plus a little Sears Catalogue a-flamin'.

What the hell—throw the
whole damn book ablaze
down there—
That would catch it for sure,
the residue of neglected,
to-be-burned
Sears catalogue at the bottom
of the pit.

Hot damn! That worked,
the son-of-a-bitch finally
caught fire and began to burn.

Oh, I forgot to mention, Junior
 cussed like a sailor,
 he could put even me
 in the shade there
But it weren't my fault,
 He'd had better training,
 Able and all, as he was
 to go where little girls couldn't
 shouldn't mustn't!
 God forbid.

Well, as I was saying, the, uh, you know,
 son-of-a-bitch finally caught fire.
It was fascinatin' as hell
 especially as it got bigger
 and bigger and bigger
"God damn the whole thing
 is on fire.
Throw some dirt on it, more, faster
 hurry up." The son-of-a-bitch wouldn't
 go out.
"Let's get the hell out of here!"

From a distance you
 could see the whole damn
 thing go up in smoke
'Course by that time so could
 everybody else on the place.
Abandoning their post at the barn
 where they were working,
 all the men came running
 to put out the fire.

'Course by that time Me and Junior
had made ourselves real scarce
We were nowhere to be found—
'til supper time, 'bout dark.

Much to my dismay, what else
would be the topic of the day!
I've never been known
for a talent at deception
But I, however clumsy,
did my dead-level best to
transform the “big topic” into small talk
(without much success, I must say).

It was sufficiently transparent
as to who the guilty were.
But our names were not “taken in vain,”
nor were we punished.

Everyone knew, we meant
no harm
We weren't up to no good,
We just didn't have
nothin' else to do —

... on a Beautiful Day in October

Just a Country Girl

She was raised on Pecos West,
long before
her global quest,
She was just a country girl,
whose heart and soul
could find no rest.

She rode by night,
to village huts, etched
in morning light,
Always just a country girl,
who sought her home
in each new plight.

She rode in rickshaws,
with life spent
for a cause,
She was just a country girl,
who went to care
for every pearl.

She climbed on top,
of dear ol'
Ayers Rock,
She was just a country girl,
who loved the deserts
of the world.

She lived up the Nile,
and sailed the faluka
in her own style,
She was just a country girl,
doomed to serve
throughout the world.

Back home again came she,
came to see
that Pecos running free,
She was just a country girl,
though she'd been
all around the world.

Unprotected Sex

I did NOT
give my permission
It was
unprotected sex

No one was there
to protect me
And I could not
protect myself

At least not
in the beginning
When I was a
too little girl

But when I
was nine
I came to my mind
and put a stop to it!

Thank You Mama!

Thank you Mama
 thank you Mama
You betcha Mama
 thank you Mama
You betcha Mama
 you betcha Mama
You betcha, you betcha, you betcha,
 Thank you Mama

For lettin' me go play
 with the big kids
Yes'm Mama Yes'm Mama
 Thank you Mama
For lettin' me go play
 with the Big Kids
Yes'm Mama Yes'm Mama
 Thank you Mama Thank you Mama

Even if I did a-get
 pinned down Mama
Yes, a-get pinned down Mama
 Yes'm Mama
Sure did Mama
 Yes I did Mama
I got a-pinned down
 Mama, a-Mama a-Mama

Yes'm Mama
 Yes'm Mama
He fucked me Mama
 He fucked me Mama
Yes'm Mama
 Fucked me Mama

Sure did, Sure did,
Mama, Yes a-did Mama

But Thank you Mama
Thank you Mama
For Lettin' me go
play Mama Mama
With the Big Kids
Mama Mama
You Betcha Mama Mama
Thank..... you.....

MAMA!

Postlude

Being penned up would have been a lot worse
than being pinned down.

A Dying Breed

It's the Jones Currie Family Reunion, June 30, 2000. I arrive safely at Mo Ranch after the three-hour trip from Austin. I had stopped along the way at one of my favorite roadside stands from Hunt Ranch days. I ate the lunch I had packed and had a visit with the owners. The woman remembered that Elizabeth, Ramsey, and I had last stopped by on our farewell voyage to the Kerr County T-Five Ranch.

After arriving at Mo Ranch, I rest a bit then drive to the river where relatives, known and never-will-know, are gathered. I park the car, then walk toward a mass of picnic tables under the native pecan trees clustered in the river bottom, looking for my clan. I spot a long, tall cowboy with his summer straw hat perched firmly on his head. It's my first clue that I'm in the right place—it's Cousin Lee Puckitt.

Time was that a cowboy had sooner drop his drawers than be outside without his hat, even under the shade trees. But this time Lee is the only one of my cowboy cousins with the trademark hat perched on his head like the top of a totem pole. Even the characteristic sweat-set ring-around-the-head has faded from most of those gathered who were raised in the hot West Texas sun. The cowboys are falling like flies as efforts at supplementing their income fail to save the ranches. Lee's strategy as a ranch realtor is working as he helps those ranchers who have "gone under" sell their property. Once sold, each rancher moves to town looking for greener pastures in the parched urban life of the city. The irony of it all! Will we find it? Only time will tell whether or not the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, or the horizon as the case may be.

Looking back, I guess one way or another it's always been this way. For me the most memorable stories of this reunion were

of my Grandmother Weddell's effort to save the family land. First time around it was rescuing her father's land. After one of her brothers was killed in a land dispute (see archive book "Along the Acorn Trail" for more details), her mother and father were so heartbroken that her father started selling off the land. He owned 100 sections (a section is around 640 acres) when the selling began. When he had sold down to 35 sections, Grandmother decided "enough was enough," so she and her two sisters persuaded their father to stop selling the land and give it to the children instead. He did so.

And again later, Grandmother struggled to save the land, which now included the ranch she and Granddaddy Weddell had homesteaded and otherwise acquired. Granddaddy Weddell, a much older man than Grandmother, died, leaving her with four children and ranches in three counties to care for. To save the ranches, she leased them out for grazing. When that was not enough, she cooked lunches for schoolteachers to further supplement the family income. Subsequently, some of the land was sold to pay for her children's college education.

There is yet another hardship story Grandmother told to my cousin, Sadie Puckitt, that has been just too sad to record in the public archives: While her infant daughter died of polio, her infant son, she believed, died of starvation. She thought her milk just dried up because of all the hard work in the fields, again trying to make a go of it.

Yes, there were the good times too: stories for another time. But be it good times or hard times, it makes me a bit sad as I watch the dwindling remains of a dying breed, each of us selling off the last of our spread to move on, looking for greener pastures.

Mark my words: We, or those family members that come after us, one day will buy it back for the same reason.

II. Cycles of Life

Awe Inspiring



Story Teller (Momma said)

There are stories
I need to tell.

And if not now
Then when I'm dead,
You'll be glad
you heard them.

So
Young'uns
Listen up!

Gratitude

Thank you dear
God that I
Had the joy of
having children,
Of snuggling each
to my breast
To suckle.

My Firstborn

I was awakened by wetness between my legs and a water-soaked bed. It was 6:00 A.M., March 2, 1965, two weeks before the due date of my firstborn.

Excited and mildly terrified, I elbow my husband. The drama has begun! Telephone hospital. "Come now." Put pad between my legs and we're off. By some instinct I do remember to dress.

We ease down the stairs from the third-floor apartment in the black ghetto on the west side of Chicago, 3444 Congress Parkway. It being pre-Martin Luther King's death, we can still get to the car without an armed guard. I had needed one two months before when at seven months pregnant I was dragged through the snow by a purse-snatcher as I walked from the "el" train after work. The short-strapped purse on my arm was too tight to loosen quickly over my heavy, muskrat-lined coat. The coat had protected my baby bunting and me as we were dragged through the snow, and kept us warm as I commuted to work in the cold Chicago winter.

Back to birthing. Babies usually arrive soon after the water breaks, but on the hour drive to Evanston Hospital I am still without labor pains. When we arrive at the hospital, supportive staff awaits me. I go through the routine: change clothes, labor room, hospital bed, pubic hair shaved. (What would bush women think, which doesn't occur to me at the time).

Dorothy arrives. She is my surrogate mother, colleague, friend, nurse (head of Maternal Child Health at Evanston Hospital School of Nursing), and in the end virtual doctor and delivery room spouse. In 1965 husbands were not allowed in the delivery room. Dorothy is one of the most motherly women I have ever met. On this occasion, she embodies the

role to perfection, for which I am and will be eternally grateful. She comes in to check on me now, before heading out to the routine of her day.

Still no labor. To avoid infection once the embryonic sac has broken, it is important that the baby come soon. Still no labor, so the injections to induce labor begin.

Time passes, time drags. Fred dozes at my side, his hand on my arm and head on my bed, as I labor. Periodically, a nurse comes in and runs him out so she can give me another injection.

Around the edges of teaching classes and supervising student nurses, Dorothy is in and out all day checking on me and checking in detail to see that the nurses are doing it right. From time to time, she makes suggestions and gives instructions to nurses and/or to me. No Lamaze classes in those days. It was just sink or swim—birth or abort. No mother, no midwife—except for Dorothy.

Months before, Dorothy had led me to Dr. Robert West, a paternal, kindly, and competent doctor. He was easy to be with and I welcomed his guidance, without which I might never have become pregnant—the first nor the second time. The little drops I took were like a magical fertility pill, working within a few months.

One would think that I need to stop talking about Dorothy and Dr. West and hurry my attention back to see if the baby is coming. But no, I'll guarantee you, there is plenty of time. Time is somewhat suspended anyway. The labor pains, alternating like a regular, then irregular drumbeat, keep me in the moment. Day stretches into night. The soon-to-be Daddy stays, Dorothy and Doctor go home, I know leaving instructions to be called when the time is right.

Surprisingly their sleep is not disturbed, but Dorothy is there before 6:00 A.M. the next morning, March 3, 1965. She knows I am approaching 24 hours into labor and that this cannot be allowed to go on forever. As Dorothy enters the labor room, she finds Fred and me still alone and waiting, to the beat of the drum that is now at a somewhat faster tempo. In disbelief and concern she decides to check my dilation herself. Then in quiet alarm she says, “This baby is coming,” as she rushes from the room to get help. Nurses descend, and my bed begins to roll.

Fred, now wide awake, chases the bed for 20 feet to try to kiss me goodbye. In the urgency of it all the nurses will have none of it. My entourage and I then descend through doors closed to Fred. In seconds I am through a short hallway and into the delivery room. As I am draped and washed and readied, the doctor, cool and calm, appears out of nowhere. The overhead mirror is adjusted so that I can see the birthing. Dorothy holds my hand and instructs until the doctor takes over and my Firstborn IS. “It’s a girl!” “Is she okay?” “Yes, everything is fine.” In relief and gratitude I long to hold Margaret Elizabeth. Within moments, I do.

The doctor has continued to work with me to complete the birthing process as the nurses accomplish stage one of quickly cleaning the baby and wrapping her in swaddling clothes for me to hold. At least one of the delivery room nurses is a former student of mine, who I am sure is bursting to tell the others that she was “on duty” for Mrs. Buss’s delivery.

Flash forward. I’m now in the recovery room—a room not much larger than the bed itself with one glass wall separating me from the nurse’s station. Fred is with me awaiting his first look at our new daughter, Margaret Elizabeth. I wanted her to be called Margaret but her dad had won out. We will call her Elizabeth. In my current state of delight, that seems

a moot point. Having completed the “second stage” bath, a nurse enters with Elizabeth. I indulge in Elizabeth’s snuggle beside me as Fred examines. Blood still near her ear invites a moment of panic by her father. Then he thinks maybe her ears are deformed—until he looks at mine. They are a match. Finally he concedes. All is well. Enjoy. Soon Elizabeth is taken for her third bath and I am delivered to my room.

Fast forward. The nurse warns, forewarns, and prepares me to nurse Elizabeth for the first time. Another nurse brings Elizabeth to me. Will I have milk? Will Elizabeth take hold? Yes! Yes! On both counts. All is well in the universe. (I ultimately nurse Elizabeth for 12 months, until she is weaned).

A well-deserved and good night’s sleep is had by all, punctuated by interludes of nursing Elizabeth. The next day an “on duty” nurse is another one of my former students. Her bright smile exposes that she, too, is delighted to be there attending Mrs. Buss at this joyous time in her life.

Periodically the pediatrician, whose name escapes me, stops by to examine the baby and check in with Mom. In a day or two he reveals that all is not entirely well: In a few weeks one of Elizabeth’s feet will need to be put in a cast to correct a foot that is turned slightly inward because of her position in the womb. That is a story for another time. For the moment, I am a little frightened but grateful that it is not more serious.

Due to the long labor, episiotomy, and slow recovery, the hospital stay is extended to seven days. On departure day, Elizabeth is dressed in the little yellow gown given by her Grandmother Ruth for the occasion. And upon arriving home she is “tucked in” in the new walnut baby bed provided by her Granddaddy Lindsey and Grandmother Lois.

My hometown of Ozona had done its thing: Handmade receiving blankets, hand-crocheted booties, and a full size knitted wool blanket. The latter was made by “Miss Vivian” (Clayton) in whose house I had stayed on the first night that I dated Elizabeth’s Dad. And yes, clothes of all kinds and colors and sizes. More than enough for her as-yet unborn brother as well as for Elizabeth, though some would be well worn by then.

ALL WAS WELL IN THE UNIVERSE!

“It’s a Boy”

Same song, second verse. Again, I am awakened at 6:00 A.M. by wetness between my legs and a water-soaked bed. Again, it is two weeks before the due date. But, uniquely, it is July 7, 1967, the day of birthing my second born. We still live in Chicago, 3444 Congress Parkway. This time I know the routine, so after awakening a babysitter for Elizabeth, we are off on the hour drive to Evanston Hospital.

The Ecumenical Institute summer program is well underway. I am scheduled to give a lecture at 9:00 A.M. I give it little thought at the time, but word gets around fast in the community of colleagues with whom we live. They will figure out something.

Two months prior to Elizabeth’s birth, I resigned from teaching Child Psychology at Evanston Hospital School of Nursing. It’s been almost three years since I taught there. Nonetheless, when I arrive at the hospital it is still a familiar sight in most details, but the atmosphere is somewhat different for me personally. Since my resignation, Dorothy has been promoted to Director of the School of Nursing and has now made yet another transition to Director of Nursing for the 400 bed hospital. While she is supportive, and in and out through the day, she is not able to be there for the delivery.

But this time, Dr. West sees the handwriting on the wall. He apparently “ups the ante” in inducing labor. Even so, it is still a long labor, especially for a second born. The baby arrives in 12 hours rather than in 24 hours, as was the case for my firstborn. “It’s a boy!” Lindsey Fredric Buss. It’s the best of all possible worlds to have a boy and a girl.

He will be called Lindsey. It saddens me a bit to think that his namesake died in January when I was just three months pregnant.

Between a lingering student nurse or two and Dorothy and other excellent nurses at Evanston Hospital, Lindsey and I are well cared for. Lindsey, too, takes hold and is easily breastfed. He never seems to nurse quite as long as Elizabeth tended to. Lindsey is also weaned sooner, after about nine months of age (rather than twelve months as with Elizabeth). I feel more comfortable the second time around and everything is a bit easier.

According to plan, when I went to the hospital to have Lindsey, Elizabeth was put on the plane to Aunt Honey's and Uncle Lin's. However, the anticipated week's stay turned out to be a month because while there Elizabeth came down with the mumps—a story for another time.

When Mother and Child arrive home, there is a precedent for the routines. Hand-me-down baby bed and clothes await us. There is even an unworn blue suit for about a two-year-old given as a gift before Elizabeth was born. There are also the less-used blue-trimmed receiving blankets plus a well-worn yellow cotton blanket—one of my favorites. It's time to de-emphasize the pink ones—emergency use only, I guess. Of course in those days there was no predicting the sex of the baby. It was strictly “luck of the draw” and a delightful surprise from the Mystery.

ALL WAS WELL IN THE UNIVERSE!

Lindsey's Awe Toy Fear and Fascination

The setting is Sydney, Australia, in a little two-story colored row house in Redfern on something-or-other-street, number whatever. The time period begins pre-Christmas in the year 1968. Calculate it: Lindsey is just under 18 months old, a mostly “happy as a lark” toddler.

We celebrated Christmas a bit early that year because the whole family would be traveling to Adelaide on Christmas Day to set up for a two-month-or-so summer program. But none of this diminished our joyous Christmas. Lindsey got the “highlight” toy that year, a robot, not quite his height but more than big enough to get his attention.

From the outset, it was a love affair of fear and fascination between Lindsey and that toy. When someone—not Lindsey—turned on the robot, it would travel until it hit something—not Lindsey—then it would turn and go the other way. This excited and fascinated Lindsey—until it headed his way, at which point the fear set in. Then he would head in the other direction as fast as his “lickety-split” little legs would carry him. He usually ended up in the next room where he could somewhat—but not for sure—safely peek . . . around the corner . . . to continue his love affair with life. (It would prove to be only the beginning.)

Psalm 00

A Lost Cause

Why oh God
did you abandon
me, in my children's
time of need?
Why did you
desert me,
breaking their hearts?
Where then was
my path? Why did
it not cross theirs,
only to leave
them alone
without protection
and guidance?
Why did you
present them,
if only to be
abandoned, left alone
to find their own way?
Now where is
your guidance, to secure
them their own paths?

Christmas Mourning (1976)

Mommy-Daddy Christmas call
we all await,
A little letter comes
too late

Gifts galore from
U.S. stores, but
Missing still is
just one more

No, not from Jack Frost's
Santa land
But one to fill the heart,
from way off Egypt's desert sand.

May 17, 1997

Dear Elizabeth, Dear Lindsey,

While relaxing at the ranch last weekend, a cool late spring swept over me. My cells remembered the early mourn of winter in Bayad (Egypt). They remembered how sad it was without you, how alone it was in the desert of my being.

I love you,

Mom

Recycle, Reclaim

Dear children, please
 forgive yourselves
For all the many ways
 in which
I hurt, and
 otherwise wounded you.

I know it
 comes full circle
As though it
 were you
Who called the
 cycle forth

But no, indeed
 it was not
You who merit
 blame, but I
Who carried forward
 guilt and shame.

Please stop the
 cycle, reclaim
Your innocence
 so well deserved.
Celebrate the full beauty
 of who you are

And I the same
 will join in, to
Hold your hand,
 our innocence to claim,
And recycle back, the full
 beauty from which we came.

II. Cycles of Life



*For Better and
For Worse*

Destiny

August 1961

Lyn and Nettie Ruth had conspired
that Fred and I should meet.

From Nettie Ruth's collection of coffee cups,
Fred unknowingly selected
the one I had given her.

DESTINY.

Parted

It was never
meant to be
But there it was
for all to see

Vows were broken
teardrops shed
There was as yet
so much unsaid

Babes full grown
and more
Wounded right down
to the core

The girl determined
it would not be
Was cast about
again at sea

The boy in silence
stood his ground
His pain withstood
also profound

And Mom and Dad
a sight to see
were torn apart,
so sad,
though free.

In Life Again?

Will I ever be
in life again,
As once I was
in love,
Or will I fall
and crumble,
Losing sight
of morning dove?

Will I ever see
the lilacs bloom,
And springtime sing
anew,

Or will I fade
as autumn leaf,
To rest in
winter dew?

Will I step
in picture book,
And turn the page
once more,
Or will I hide
between the lines,
To settle up
the score?

Who knows the fate
of forest trees,
Of blossoms
in the wind,
And who shall
guide the way,
Of a lost soul,
in the end?

The End of the World

Fred always said the world
would come to an end
in August.

Little did he know
that when it did
he would go on living.

Yet not without feeling
like the living dead
descending into hell.

Being raised from the dead is no mean trick.
What goes down
does not always come up.

It doesn't happen just by wishing it were so,
or by elaborating a really fine story
about how it did.

You don't automatically reappear
just because that's how the story goes
or because someone promises that the passage
of time heals all.

No, the journey is yours,
there are no short cuts,
no simple answers,

There is no hamburger helper
and the prime rib
is tougher than expected.

Surely there is a way out!
Perhaps we can rewind the tape
or put it on fast-forward.

But why do that?
We might miss the torture of descent,
the searing of all that is irrelevant.

And what about me?
I might miss the truth:
that though all else fails, I exist!

The residue?
The sorrow of a fading past
and the hope of a new beginning.

Yes, the joke is on us.
When everything dies and the earth stands still
we go on living.

Even the rock in the middle of the road is no hindrance
for the resurrected need no road
and require no predetermined path.

The world came to an end in August all right,
precisely as he said it would.
But I did not . . .
nor did he.

Tar Baby, Tar Baby

Tar Baby, Tar Baby
I'm stuck on you
You're just a Tar Baby
I can't let go of you

I go to bed alone at night,
you're in my dreams anew
Tar Baby, Tar Baby
I'm still in love with you
You're just a Tar Baby
No matter what I do

I know for sure you've gone away,
that just makes me blue
Tar Baby, Tar Baby
it's time that we were through
But you're just a Tar Baby
No matter what I do

When I see you with her again
It gives me not a clue
Tar Baby, Tar Baby
how to rid myself of you
You're just a Tar Baby
No matter what I do

I too have found a new love,
but my heart cannot be true
Cause Tar Baby, Tar Baby
you are with me too
You're just a Tar Baby
No matter what I do

Tar Baby, Tar Baby
I'm stuck on you
You're just a Tar Baby,
I can't let go of you

The Solitary Life

I could have walked with him
on water in the moonlight
Or strolled along the riverbank
searching for we knew not what

But I preferred the humbler path
of solitary life
To standing below the pale blue sky
and catching the eye . . .

of yet another man.

Father's Day Deceased

Fred and I parted
23 years ago
(after 26 years of marriage).
Still, a world without
Fred in it
seems strange.

Where will I send
my Father's Day cards,
about ties?
There are none to be found
for divorcees.

Whether in this world
or the next,
He will always be
the father of
my children.

There are images
and stories,
They will always exist,
just not quite
the way Fred told them.

Postlude

I always said that
with Fred's stories
You had to divide
by two and add one
to approximate reality.

Now I guess we'll
 have to subtract one
 and multiply by two
To get a halfway
 decent story.

Yes, I guess we'll all miss
 the story teller—
And have a lot more
 time on our hands.

Safe Passage

Marriages aren't always easy,
nor are divorces
There have been
a number of times
That I thought
Fred might not
make it to Heaven.

Now I can rest
assured, that
he'll get there.

God always provides
a way:
Fifth City Rocket Ship,
forever standing,
Plus colleagues and family as
little booster.

Postlude

Something told Fred
all those years ago
That he might need
that Rocket Ship.
AMAZING!

We don't always
have to know
the reason why,
We just need to
"Listen up."

An Everlasting Presence (Far Better)

Finally, a tear shed
for His passing,
Holding tightly
to my sadness.

Letting go is not
so easy, now
That I do not
have to play defense.

Relief is my
first response,
Knowing I would no longer
need to fear His “demands”
or ongoing simple requests.

Still, His everlasting presence
is sure to require
More of me, than
I would otherwise provide.

He did, after all,
make me a better person,
Kicking and screaming
most of the time.

I would never have
known what I
was capable of
Had I not
married Him.

Or for that matter
divorced Him,
Still kicking
and screaming.

Postlude #1

I am really tired
of being stretched.
Peace be with me.

Postlude #2

(And Far Worse)

At the same
time
I could not say
“no harm done.”

There was a price
to be paid
For that union
for better and

Far worse
than I could have
Ever imagined
at the outset.

It was not
a happy ending.
There was
a new beginning.

GRATEFULLY

II. Cycles of Life

The New Horizon



Little Gifts

Lindsey says, “Momma,
why do you
Talk about this
thorny mess?”

I say, “Lindsey,
you can’t
Look a ‘gift horse’
in the mouth.

I take ‘em
as they come,
My little gifts
one by one.”

Just for the Quiet of It

I go out to
the Ranch
Just for the quiet of it.

I climb in
the Hills
Just for the sheer quiet of it.

I walk along
River's edge
Just for the quiet of it.

Are you with me?

I lie down in
the arms of Mother Earth
Just for the quiet of it.

I gaze into
clouded Blue Sky
Just for the quiet of it.

I hear morning
bird song,
the very quiet of it.

Now, at last,
I am
the Quiet of it.

Our Little Dog Laid to Rest

In Her short life
She was the best
She lived Her day
so full of zest

Now this great earth
is Her new nest
Here Foxy Lady
laid to rest.

The Lady's Home Companion My Sheltie

Foxy Lady
was my
lady's home companion.
Still now
she travels
with me
On a road
less traveled,
far and wide
A spirit I love dearly
a soul always
near me.

**A Penny
for Your Thoughts
Lindsey Buss**

Lindsey Buss, what
were you thinking,
When you came
into this world
With its rough and tumble ways?

What were you
thinking, when
You toddled
to and fro
Chasing a robot
you didn't quite know?

Lindsey Buss, what
were you thinking,
When you became
a coat
Hidden in the coat rack,
our little lost coat?

What were you
thinking, when the
School bell rang
way off in Belgium
The language
not the same?

Lindsey Buss, what
were you thinking
When you paddled
the Guadalupe
Up river, in your
lone canoe?

What were you
thinking, when
Your pro bono work
brought you too
Close to death
for your own comfort?

Lindsey Buss, what
were you thinking
When Martha's Table
called,
Seeking your services
for the good of all?

What were you
thinking, when
The sunset in Sedona
lingered, like
A mother's
too long goodbye?

Lindsey, Lindsey, when
you first
Laid your eyes
on this beauty
Before you, what, what
were you thinking?

Now, now as you
sit beside . . . this
Heart-filled woman,
each beside the other,
What, what, Lindsey Buss
are you thinking, now?

**Betina Franceschini
Frances
The Lineage**

My Momma's name
she carries
Forward, sandwiched
in the middle
Between love and kindness.

My Mamma's spirit
she carries forward too,
But in her own
unique way.
No copycat will
lead her astray.

It's not Betina's thing
to make my Mama's
Custard Pudding.
She brews instead
Her own brand
of care and comfort.

Thankfully, Betina has not
my mother's temper.
I search in vain
for her Achilles' heel:
Some slight imperfection,
when I will love her still.

I'm glad, Betina, that
you carry my mother's
Lineage. Though you're clearly
not the same,
You are a daughter,
I intend to claim.

My Cousin the Potter

Only if I claim
the lineage of
My son's wife (to be), is
the potter my cousin.

In the spirit
of things, I do,
Feeling a kinship with
his delicate hands.

I have never met
my-cousin-the-potter
Yet I feel somehow, that
I know his fragile heart.

We live in cultures that
speak two different tongues
But it is as though
we speak the same,

Each reaching for the moon
in the creation of
A small pot or a little poem
that touches the soul.

Whether or not
I ever lay eyes
On my-cousin-the-potter,
halfway around from my world,

It is nonetheless a
joy to be touched by his
thirteen-year-old soul
and to find . . . a kindred spirit.

Soul Food

Lindsey phoned and
Betina happied
My heart with the
idea of family food.

Their idea was to
choose one
Or two, I chose
two, to cook.

We would celebrate
my birthday a
Week late but
right on time

By having an
“all in the kitchen”
Cookfest, just the way
my family used to do.

For Thanksgiving or
Christmas, Daddy
Did the dressing and pretty much
took care of the turkey.

I think he was
the only one
Who knew how
to do it right.

He took pride in it
right down to
Carving it at the
table for ten or more.

Or like when we
were at Auntie Mae's
Where it was mostly
women in the kitchen
but never alone.

Or like the twenty-something
Christmas when
I taught Lindsey how
to make the dressing.

Or the Christmas where
Ramsey bailed me out
By finishing up the
best-ever sweet potato recipe.

It's the "everybody
in the kitchen"
Or "coming and going
to see what they
can do"

That makes the meal with
the most love,
And you can't
persuade me otherwise.

The kind of love
that feeds the
Soul when everyone
gathers round

To "Bless this food
to our use
And us to thy
service. AMEN. "

III. Beyond Good and Evil

Risk Takers



**A
Morsel
of
Memory**

Margynel, as I
quietly ate alone
My simple Christmas meal,
I could not
Help but think of you
as I tasted every morsel.

It was sweet consolation,
to know without a doubt
That you would not
pass this world
without having known
its full flavor.

For it was you
who taught me thus:
To savor every sweet
and bitter morsel
And too, from whence it came
and laid to rest, the same.

The Burning Bush

Kindness
 called forth.
Kaze has done
 it again,
Sacrificing
 to bring
Out the best
 in all of us.

Even if it's only
 "in the whiteness
of a washed
 pocket handkerchief,"
Or searching
 for that
From which we can
 detach ourselves,

Perhaps it's from the not-needed
 or maybe even the cherished,
"One and same
 from whence it came,"
Calling us each
 to let go,
Breathe deeply,
 surrender.

Bo

What I remember
about Bo is that
He had eyes so deep
that you could enter
And walk around in his soul
to be enveloped by his kindness.

Yes, a soul so deep
that it would
Lead you to Heaven
if you let it.
He let it.

Taking Responsibility

There is a fine line
 between playing God
And taking responsibility
 for my behavior.

It is a fine,
 but important line
That lies between
 the two:

An event that
 makes us whole
Despite the behavior
 of our past,

And does acknowledge
 my part
In all its
 shades of gray.

But God it
 does not make me,
In control
 of then or now.

At best it
 can reshape me
And bring me
 home again, somehow.

A Day of Prayer: Abandonment

May we, this day,
hold in our hearts
and pray
for all those
who

Were Abandoned
and/or
Felt Abandoned

in the context
of the culture
and
the community
of which,
at some time
and in some place,
each of us was a part.

Until You Weep No More

I will be by your side
until I can weep no more.
Then I will send another to take my place
until she weeps no more.
And so on it will go,
until you weep no more.

The Pitfalls of Our Past

Lest we protest
too much
Or concede the
same,

It was not all
the mission
Nor in any simple
way, the culture.

It was the dynamic
complexity of life itself
Taking form in its
own unique way.

Would we wish
it different?
Certainly, in
lots of ways.

Would we like back
our innocence
And the same for those
harmed along the way?

Yes, but to have it so
would deny our path
And leave another
strewn with tears.

Do we really think
we could have
Somehow escaped
or done this one differently?

If so, I dare say
we still carry
The same naivety
with which we wounded last.

Going forward, if we
choose again to push the edge
We may, in some unforeseen way, harm
and hurt once more.

But perhaps
this time 'round
We can hold and heal
in a better way.

Maybe we will even
step forward
Sooner, and protect
those in the fray.

Or walk a clean
and clearer path
And gently love
all those who pass this day.

A Configuration of Souls

For me, the communities
of my past
are past.

My community now
is a configuration
of souls.

It is a smaller
yet wider
gathering
That keeps my
spirit whole,
now that

I am an older
yet wiser
friendly soul.

III. Beyond Good and Evil

Faith Makers



Calling

911

01

Is any body there?

The War Zone

Time drags . . . slow
motion, into an
Invisible war zone
of silence.

Yes, go searching there,
in the far reaches
Within ourselves, to find
the elusive enemy

Listen carefully for
a faint cry of life
Buried beneath
the rubble

Dig deep, far
into the night,
Amid the floodlights
of hope.

Perhaps,
if we are lucky
We will find what
we are looking for

The (Last) Word

Diversity is
 our salvation,
A balancing act
 of oneness
Through which
 each is made whole.

Fundamentalism must
 be respected,
As much as any
 brand of tyranny.
(Respect the wisdom
 in all things.)

It may hold
 the missing kernel,
The last piece
 of the puzzle.
It may have . . .
 the last word.

The Seventh Day Mr. President

It is not necessarily
the external
Strategy with which
I disagree,

But the internal
assumptions
Give me cause
for concern.

Might we pause
for just a moment
To listen for
the underlying reason.

People do not
give their lives
Willy-nilly simply
to injure others.

Perhaps they are trying
to tell us something,
Perhaps we need
to listen.

Maybe they just want
to get our attention,
Maybe they just want
to be heard.

Do you suppose
we ourselves
Could crack the
door just a little?

Do you suppose
we could
Open our hearts
to the outside world?

Do you suppose
we might,
For just a moment,
step into their shoes?

What if they,
like an innocent child,
Are seeking our help,
our compassion?

Do we have it
in us, to lead
The way to peace
and harmony, worldwide?

Wouldn't it be
something if
The tragedy of
September the 11th

Turned us inside
out and exposed
The compassionate
human being within.

What then would be
The New World Order?
Would we all find
but one God within?

A TRILOGY

A Little Prayer

Please, dear God,
 may I reap
The rewards
 of my mistakes.

A Beggar Be

My soul begs
 for mercy,
Crying out
 “I surrender.”

A Question Mark

What would happen
 if I were to pass over
The threshold of fear, into
 the land of peace and harmony?

Maniac Man

Blacka man
my friend,
We have a
new enemy.

Black, white, red,
yellow,
Flip a coin,
kill a fellow

Root 'em out
smoke 'em out,
Get 'em any way
we can

Go fast to
every land,
Kill 'em down
to the last man

Right down to
you and me,
And I'm not so
Sure . . . about thee.

Beyond the Veil

What lies behind
the veil of
Violence, beyond the
scope of love-me-nots?

Stands there, an
unmasked man,
Master of no
Holy Land.

Cowers there, a
woman longing
To be held
in freedom's fold.

Crying there, in wait,
a child of
No Tomorrow.
(Only Sorrow).

IV. From Here to Eternity



The Healing Side of Soul

A Wake Up Call

Natural Light

Spontaneous Compassion

Healing Presence

The Healing Process

It has come
clear to me:
All things are
a part of
The healing process—
even the wounding.

Healing of what,
of whom?
That I do
not entirely know.
I do know this:
I am a part of it.

Is it of another
lifetime?
Or perhaps another world,
or this?
I do not know,
but I am a part of it.

Again and again
I ask myself,
How long . . .
will it take?
This I do know: It takes
as long as it takes.

Wounding and Healing

I sometimes think
that what
Life is all about
is simply
Wounding
and healing
Wounding
and healing
Wounding
and healing.

And, believe you me,
I have done my share
of both.

I have sometimes
wounded with
malice and deliberate intent,
I have sometimes
wounded inadvertently,
with the very best of intentions,
Sometimes I
wounded because
I was paying no attention at all.
But mostly I wounded,
because I had not the courage,
to do my own healing.

For Cryin' Out Loud

I am
where I am.

I cannot cry
the future.
I cannot cry
the past.
I can only
CRY NOW.

But the past is part
of who you are.

Exactly

And where I am with it,
is the
now.

Rock-Throwin' Mad

Sometimes I get
Rock-throwin' mad.
Anger burns deep
in my soul

I lash out
at the world
And at any and
everyone in it.

The Matter of Life and Death

Life
is such a pain
It builds us up
and brings us down again

It gives
us hope
And casts us
into despair

No wonder
we seek refuge in solitude
Or hide
among the multitudes

Our dreams turn sour,
illusions to become,
Despair gives way to hope
as truth prevails.

Which way
this merry-go-round?
How goes
the ferris wheel?

Life beckons us
into the sky,
And life makes us wish
that we could die

Then lays to rest
 our everlasting best
And peace bestows
 among the saddened foes.

So 'tis thus, breath is given
 once again
To those whose stories
 are, as yet, untold.

Fear not,
 though life will take its toll,
Life too will cast the mold
 of hopes and dreams,
 its promise to unfold.

A Mid-Life Crisis

Time . . .
 just slips away
Be it in days . . .
 or months, or years.

Despite infinite accomplishments,
 it seems
That life is
 for naught.

True meaning
 has faded,
Each expectation—
 one by one—aborted.

Where does one go
 at the end of the road,
What is to happen
 in the untold mode?

Perhaps all content
 is surrendered.
And the journey inward
 begins anew.

Why . . . will I not
 just let it be,
Somehow to disclose
 the untouched me?

Is it the
 fears that abound
That what will be disclosed
 is in fact unsound?

Or is it
in truth
The loss
of my youth?

Or is
the real reason
The fear
of more treason?

No, it's
none of these . . .
It's the wind
in the trees

Cactus Blossom

Life can sometimes
 be a thorny mess,
And cast shadows
 only in my direction.

Then again,

Blossoms burst forth
 from the desert floor,
To celebrate the harvest
 fruit of my abundant life.

A Lunar Eclipse

Healing is like an
 Eclipse
Where mind and body
 Manifest as one
And light
 Illumines all Darkness.

Fireflies in the Night

Like fireflies
in the night,
In the midst
of darkness,
Comes clear the light.

A Painful Process

I wonder
if it is a painful process
for a caterpillar
to turn into a butterfly,
or
a snake
to shed its skin.

Yes,

that's why

compassion.

Healing Springs

The whole earth
bathes me
The whole earth
loves me
The whole earth
bathes me
in its love.

Feeling Like a Rose

I awaken
surrounded by morning cold,
feeling like a rose.
The nourishment of being
leaves nothing to fear.

Waters cradle me
as a babe in the womb,
Then open wide as rivers,
to flow onward into ocean deeps.

I know full well
as surely as the river flows
and oceans beckon,
This rose will be sustained
'til its full bloom weeps,
at season's end.

The Thought of It Alzheimer's

The thought of
Alzheimer's
Frightens me.

Who will remember
the nuance of
Foods that I eat

Or how to care
for me, and which
Place to bury me?

The thought of
Alzheimer's
Frightens me.

How will I
know to
Love another

Or that they
once
Loved me?

The thought of
Alzheimer's
Frightens me.

Will I recognize
the beauty of
The earth

Or that God
made
Little green apples?

The thought of
Alzheimer's
Frightens me.

What lies beneath
the surface?
Will I be mean

Or will love
and kindness
Hold their own?

The thought of
Alzheimer's,
Runs from me.

I chase it
away, and await
Another day.

It turns out,
not to be my
Problem anyway.

Postlude

Mark Twain said, “I’ve had a lot of problems in my day—
most of which never happened.”

But just in case—

Post Postlude

“It turns out,
not to be *MY*
Problem, anyway.”

God bless those
willing to
Take me in—

Into their homes,
INTO . . . THEIR HEARTS.

A Good Memory

Though I am
 pushing sixty
I have a
 good memory

The more my
 mind forgets
The more my
 cells remember

Be It Understood

The psyche heals when one feels understood.

But it is only in understanding another
that the soul is made whole.

The Greatest Gift

Sometimes the greatest gift
is the smallest act of kindness.

The Healing Side of Soul

Prelude

I was sprinkled, rather
than immersed, with
Precious water
from the River Jordan

Brought back by our pastor
from a trip to the Holy Land
For the soul . . .
purpose of baptizing.

I'm glad as an
adult, that
there are additional
alternatives.

The Healing Side of Soul

Go swimming nude,
in the river nearby.
Take the hand of
another, on a mountain high.

Who do you find
in the river nearby?
Did you touch the soul of
another, on the mountain high?

Return safely to
shore of the river nearby.
Come down from the
mountain, your soul soaring high.

Flow forth like a
stream, from the river nearby.
Walk the valley, held gently by
a hand from on high.

Postlude

If you are offended,
you probably have
Not been “swimming nude
in a river nearby,”
And most likely you
weren’t baptized by immersion.
So how could you
possibly know
What I am
talking about?

Post Postlude

If that’s still too much nudity
For you, then
Simply substitute
The word “alone.”

Faith, Hope, and Love

Faith

The realization that where I am “with the past”
is not the same as the past.

Hope

The acknowledgment that where I am “with the past,” now,
is not necessarily where I will be “with the past”
in the future.

Love

Honoring where each of us is “with the past” at this time
(including ourselves).

Just Imagine

For months now, following a tooth extraction,
I have been plagued
with weak and sore jaws.

Nothing seems to help much.

Not “alternative medicine”:

not my chiropractor of over 15 years,
not my Chinese acupuncturist of several years.

Not “modern medicine”:

not three neurologists following a small stroke,
not my primary care doctor nor dental specialists.

There has been

no significant benefit from eating only soft food
and smoothies,
nor from severely limiting talking in person or
even on the phone.

In my opinion, the only thing that has helped me
has been to SMILE.

It exercises the jaw muscles that are strong and
relaxes those that are weak so that they have a chance to
heal.

A SMILE, even if only for a brief moment,
reminds me that I am not alone in this world,
it reminds me that I take things, especially myself,
far too seriously.

Christmas Eve, as I was about to leave for
a friend’s family Christmas gathering,
a neighbor rang the door bell to leave a poinsettia.
I apologized for not being able to talk much (weak jaws),
to which she replied, “but Sarah, you have such a
nice SMILE.”

So eternal optimist that I am,
I just keep SMILING.

And now in my effort to be fully in the present moment,
I IMAGINE us—you and me—
standing face to face . . .
SMILING.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

A First Class Haircut

Due to impatience,
I had for
Months been getting
myself a 10-dollar,
15-minute haircut.

It was all I
deserved anyway,
A little more than
two bits
But not a lot.

Then one day
I say to myself,
“No way, I’m a
first class
citizen of The Universe.

I deserve the
very best.
Go right up
to that podium,
Sit in that chair,

Take a 45-minute
bite out of life.
Sit back, relax
and enjoy
Every last dime of it.”

Imperfection Practice

now that
i am sixty-six
and wear purple

it is my intention
to practice, mindfully,
im-per-fec-tion
in some way
each and every day

and

to love myself,
all the better
for it.

sarah H buss

IV. From Here to Eternity



The Transparency of Being

A Whole New World

The Same Old Landscape

A Little Taste of Heaven

In the Twilight of the Night

Angels come to me
in the twilight
of the night

They whisper sweet nothings,
and hold me
tight as tight

They comfort and
console me
in the midst of fright

Angels come to me
in the twilight
of the night

They bring a host
of others, and
make my spirit bright

Dancing, dancing, dancing
to my
sheer delight

Angels come to me
in the twilight
of the night

Singing songs of sadness
and songs
to hold the light

Angels, always,
in the twilight
of the night

Two Worlds

I live in two worlds,
this world
and the other.

The trick is
to open
my heart

And let
the other world
abound in this.

I can be
the vehicle of light
OR
a container of darkness.

Urgent Living

I may not live to be a hundred
but even if I don't
I somehow know
that I have only
lived half my life.

However many years I have left
it is half a lifetime.

Perhaps this is the urgency:

Do I have but a day, a month, a year . . . (ten years),
to live half a lifetime?

Even if but a few short years remain,
it matters not, one way or the other,
because Being knows no time except Eternity,
And to Be Eternity in any space of time
requires urgent living at every moment,
while living as one who has endless time . . .
just all the time in the world.

You Pass My Way

In the wee hours
of the night,
I go searching
for those
Like-minded spirits
of the heart.

There, I find you
among them,
Always in wait: a
fond memory,
A gentle touch to
hold my hand,

A constant companion,
night and day,
There for me.
Time doth make
The heart grow fonder,
when now and then,
you pass my way.

It's Elemental

Be fluid
be flexible

Love matter;
it matters

Breathe air,
here, there

Holy fire,
deep desire.

What Then Is Spirit Sex?

It's the sex you have
at lunchtime
(instead of lunch)

OR

at 7:00 A.M.
or 1:00 o'clock
on a Sunday afternoon

It's the sex you have
on the
kitchen floor,

OR,

God forbid,
in the bedroom

It matters not
when
or where

For in such sex
there is no
time or space

You move
instead,
to a whole other place.

House Warming

A story here
and there
Now and again,
warms my
Heart. Not too long
not too short,
Just enough
to touch my heart.

Pictures sometimes lead the way
through the
Maze of sorrow, sadness,
hopes and dreams
To that place
where soul
Doth take me by the hand
to journey to another land.

Ah there, a
solitary place,
Yet not alone,
filled full
Beyond the memory
that brought
Me there. I linger now
with those who come to share.

Wooden Soldiers

Trees fall
 like wooden soldiers,
Caught in the
 line of battle.

It matters not,
 any more than
Our own death,
 so long as
 we get recycled.

Mother Earth claims
 her own
In the end,
 one way or another.

Nevertheless, it
 touches me deeply
Because I have done
 my own share
 of tree cutting.

The Promised Land

God promises
only
the present moment.

He does not
promise
the future,

only
the path
to it.

He does not
remember
the past,

only
the path
from it.

To
stay on path
is

to be
fully
in the present
moment:

God's
Promised Land

The Silence

The swirls around me
are not me,
I am
The Silence

The pain within
is not me,
I am
The Silence

The past relived
is not me,
I am
The Silence

The future hoped and dreamed
is not me,
I am
The Silence

Clear Springwaters

At last, I wade once again
in the clear springwaters
Of my life.

Minnows nibble
at my toes,
“Wake up, wake up.”

Stones talk to me
in teasing whispers,
“What color, what color am I now?”

Green moss grows
in layers of love,
Caressing my feet.

Bugs emerge
like hidden companions,
Peeking through time.

Life flows
in stand still moments,
“Here am I, here am I.”

The cold,
cold water,
Warms my heart

Bringing me full circle
to the clear
Springtime of my life.

V. Journey On, Journey On



*A Poet for the
Ecology of
the Soul*

The Planetary Poet

(I am) a Child
of the Cosmos
Sent to Care
for every Pearl.

A Poetic Past

Any attempt to
respond to
An irrational past
with rationality,
Has (for me) proven to be
woefully inadequate

So I have
turned to poetry
Reading, writing,
transcending both
The rational and
the irrational

It is here . . . I make sense
of the senseless,
It is here . . . I find meaning
in the meaningless,
And it is here . . . that, sometimes,
there is rest for the restless.

A Gathering of Poets

This is not a
gathering of poets.
It is for those
willing to bare
their souls,
To tell the tales
so long untold.

It is for those who
dare to search
The beauty of the night
and to see darkness
in the dawn of morning light.

This is not a
gathering of poets.
It is for those
with wounds
so wide
They carry all the floodwaters
of days gone by.

It is for those who,
who dream
their dreams
And hope
against all hope.

This is not a
gathering of poets.
It is a gathering, for you
and me,
And all those
who long to be.

It is a gathering
to bring us
home again,
To find the soul,
we've always been.

V. Journey On, Journey On



The Calling, The Path

One Moment Pleased

A color-coded foursome,
each their
own hue
Walk before me
in a last-minute
stew

They move in step
as though to
a drum
In an ancient
rhythm, dancing
as one.

Destiny calls
from a long
distant past,
Gifts to the future
before me,
at last.

Ash Wednesday
March 3, 1965
Margaret Elizabeth Buss

Child, from ashes
 thou dost come,
A gift of life,
 from the Holy One,

Not mine, nor yours,
 nor any to possess,
The gift of life,
 sheer holiness.

Comes now this child
 a gift to life,
To be ordained,
 in holy life.

(To be ordained
 to the whole of life).

My Calling

My calling, my path,
as surely as
The high and mighty,
this mundane
Step forward
into life

Calling my connection
my decision
My direction
into life.

Risk taking, faith making
into life
(is my life).

A Good Goodbye

My path or yours?

Neither.

We each go our
own way

And hope our paths
will cross again someday.

Will it be sooner, or later?

Neither.

We each take our
own good time about it

And know that when we meet,
we'll be right on time.

Is it in this world, or the next?

Both.

We are always
there for one another

My heart in yours,
and your heart,
tucked neatly away in mine.

Epilogue



The Other Side of Midnight

On the other side of midnight
lies the dawning
of a new day.

Author Notes

Page 55: 3444 Congress Parkway, former residence of The Ecumenical Institute

Page 59: community of colleagues, members of an intentional ecumenical community who were the staff of The Ecumenical Institute

Page 63: Christmas Mourning, the sorrow of Sarah's children on Christmas morning in the United States while their parents were away in Egypt

Page 76: Fifth City, a community development project of The Ecumenical Institute

Page 76: Rocket Ship, a large playground slide in the shape of a rocket ship in the center of the playground of the Fifth City preschool

Page 92: "in the whiteness of a washed pocket handkerchief," line from a poem by D. H. Lawrence often quoted in programs conducted by The Ecumenical Institute

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Author Photo © Harriet Holleman Photography
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Sarah H. Buss **A Poet for the Ecology of the Soul**

Sarah's path has taken her from the arid hills of West Texas, around the world and back again. From the outset, the desert has shaped and reshaped the soulful nature of her being. The Chihuahuan Desert was the setting for her early years, spent on the family ranch "twenty-five miles south of nowhere and the nearest gas station" in the mythic land west of the Pecos. Later in her life the deserts of Australia, Upper Egypt, and Sedona, Arizona, left their mark, reflected in the sparse beauty and rhythm of her poetry.

After earning a B.S. degree from the University of Texas, Austin, and an M.S. from Penn State University, Sarah was married in 1962. She located in the Chicago area and taught Child Development

at Evanston Hospital School of Nursing. For fifteen years she lived in and out of Chicago and overseas, working in village and community development, adult education, and management training for an international not-for-profit organization.

Upon returning to Texas with her husband and two children in 1977, Sarah began managing the family ranchland. For three and a half years she was also employed as State Director of Volunteer Services for The Texas Department of Human Resources. Sarah has served as President of the Board of the Leadership Texas Alumnae Association. She was instrumental in designing and implementing a unique mentoring program for select women at The University of Texas Law School.

The gentle words of her mother first introduced Sarah to poetry. Her awareness of poetry as such first came while attending a one-room schoolhouse on the family ranch. It was not until after her divorce in 1988 and the departure of her children to college and careers that she found the “time and space of mind” to write poetry on a regular basis. The difficult challenge of coping with unforeseen physical limitations commenced in 1990 and took her deep into a poetic journey of physical and spiritual healing. With the dawn of the new millennium and the encouragement of her poet mentor, K Moon Winters, Sarah began performing and reciting her poetry in a style that continues to emerge from and manifest the rich diversity of her life.

In *The Other Side of Midnight*, Sarah Buss's soul-felt book of poetry and essays, takes the reader from tears to smiles as we feel like a fly on the wall observing Sarah's journey through life, love, loss, anger, joy and, most of all, her progression toward growth and wholeness.

—**Pam Autrey**, BA, MLS, PhD
University of Texas

A performing poet for the ecology of the soul, Sarah will help you traverse the memories you want to conserve while releasing others to the wildness of your own inner landscape.

—**Robyn Nygumburo Bridges**,
M Ed, LCPC Psychotherapist,
author of upcoming book
*Moose Medicine: Healing Wisdom
From the Natural World*

Sarah's work is rich, wide-ranging, and very personal. She uses startlingly strong, vivid images. The pathos of Sarah's experiences of loss is palpable, as is her extravagant joy over the gifts that bless her life. While this work represents Sarah's unique journey, it also depicts in many ways the journey of all women. I see this work as the "song of a woman who has come through" (after D.H. Lawrence).

—**Marilyn R. Crocker**, Ed D
Educational and Organizational Development Consultant

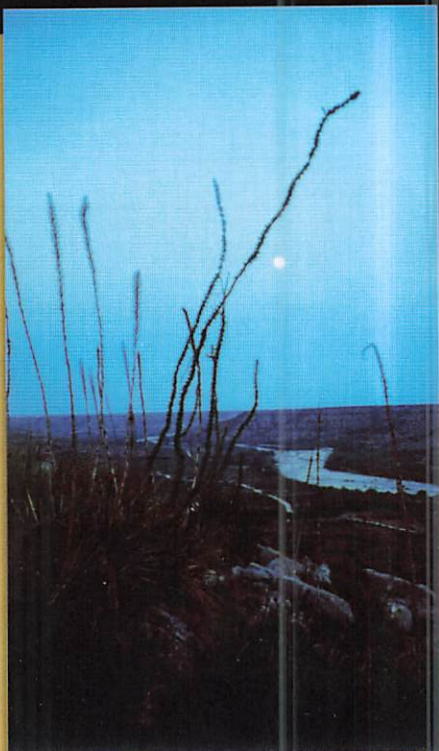
On the Other Side of Midnight is an invitation to set aside moments of solitude. Using a wry sense of humor, Sarah Buss writes sensitively about traumas others fear to mention. Her poetry evokes the mystery of desert spaces and star-filled skies.

—**LiDoña Wagner**
Author, *PILGRIMAGE Wonder
Encounter Witness*



Author Sarah H. Buss

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ISBN 978-0-9850458-1-4



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