



THE YELLOW TULIP

&
Other Poems

by
Rod Rippel

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And
Other Poems

By
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Rodney Rippel
e-mail: rodrippel@cox.net
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Rod Rippel

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Yellow Tulip

The yellow tulip in the center of the table,
strange I didn't notice you when I came in
yet I must have been aware,
aware of you at some unconscious level.
That's the truth isn't it of flowers
and art forms of flowers
sitting in our rooms and yards and offices.
An art form communicates at some non-verbal
inarticulate level
transforming me subtly but surely.

Yes, yellow tulip, in your place of honor
you are revolutionary,
transforming reality.
Forcing me to relate to my relationship to you,
you invite interpretation,
consciousness and
eventually a whole story of creation!
That is revolutionary power as you sit there
working on my unconscious self
demanding consciousness and
transformed relationship.

Is it not true that you have power?
Was it not your ancestors
transformed the dull financial markets of Europe?
Where one blossom's value exceeded the
cost of houses, horses, gold jewelry!
There is power in a yellow tulip
sitting in the middle of a table of men
to transform those men, silently but powerfully,
a poem inserted,
the tip of a wedge into rock selves,
sensitive and delicate, a winged gift.
The rock will split! And we will come at the wonder!

In Praise of Weeds

They grow without restraint
Other plants hang back, need
Encouragement and coaxing
Weeds show no discipline
Their appearance is chaotic and 'natural'
Their colors wan and unimposing
They attract no predators and
Very few synergistic helpers
I wonder, who pollinates a weed?
Perhaps co-dependent bees
Who don't have enough selfhood
To embrace a real flower
Someone said a weed is a plant
No one has found a use for yet
Implying we haven't found a way
To exploit this genre of life
Our immediate response to a weed
Hack it down, uproot it, throw it away
Which begs the question
Are there really weeds
Truly useless living things
That justify such response
I suspect no

A weed is unappreciated potential
A weed is stubborn life
A weed survives
A weed succeeds where others give up
A weed is learned aggressiveness
A weed manifests subtle display
A weed explores successful reproduction
A weed harbors species we don't value
Or take time to learn about
A weed manifests beauty
Upsetting artificial order
With nature's wild chaos
A weed explores surprising niches
In the eco system to set up house
Weeds are carriers of strong DNA

**Friends to animals and soil
Weeds don't waste time
Making surplus fruit
They are models of spare living.**

Amaryllis

It was a time when the Amaryllis bulb sent by my sister-in-law was finally blooming in huge trumpets flaring open on the top of a three foot stalk and I thought for sure there would be a flood of scent to correspond to the explosion of orange and white bugle shaped petals. But alas, none at all. No scent. And, I wondered how a flower can restrict itself to only one sense, in this case the visual, or perhaps, like light itself, there are odors and smells beyond the range our olfactory cilia can detect. Is amaryllis above or below the spectrum of our noses? Pity it can't broadcast in a fabulous chord of aromas, a real bouquet, like the layered rose from our yard with that huge cloying bass note overlain with a range of middle tones reaching way back into the back of the throat where you almost imagined yourself tasting the flower instead of smelling it.

Oh Amaryllis, delight of the eye and so bold on your stalk. Surely you have other messages to that unformed place in my psyche reached by the inaudible and non-visual! An imagined smell of orange and white ice mixed with raw greens, a chord releasing at some deep level the true significance of flower, what you are! That beauty could be distilled into one space and point of time. Putting forth it's essence into fragments of its very being so that when it collapses it will have spent itself not just into the world, but into the soul of some beholder!

Amaryllis, you inspired some ancient poet to give you your name. Beauty captured in a flower. Named for the Greek Goddess whose blindness forever denied her the sight of you! She without eyes! You with no scent!

I imagine you, as she must have imagined so much of her existence. A chord of fragrance beyond the wildest experience of human noses that only a blind goddess could savor! Chords of heavy orange, ice clear top notes of bell like clarity reflecting the purity of your petals. Swift yellow and green fault lines of lilac raspberry texture caressing the mind itself.

Yes Amaryllis, you are lovely. But your essence eludes me. Your significance is far beyond my comprehension. You forever remain a mystery. Mysterious flower of the mystery itself, I am humbled by you.

Mockingbird

all day long
prepares a nest
procures a meal
provides a future
sings a song

patrols my yard
looking for food
hoping and
hopping
perches on my
favorite rock
hears a message
from earth beneath
injects his beak
pulls out a prise

Homeland Security

The red-tailed hawk glides effortlessly to a perch
atop the telephone pole near my driveway.
Something, a skink or rodent,
dangles from the raptor's talons.

Almost immediately two locals begin harassing.
A hummingbird darts in and out investigating
the intruder into its territory
and is quickly joined by a neighborhood
mocking bird who, upset by the presence of the hawk,
begins a clumsy copy of the hummer's act
pestering the hawk, swooping in close, sometimes
looping in midair, almost backing up before
diving in another attack.

Meanwhile the hawk is having its dinner. Pausing
now and then calmly turning its head to observe
the acrobatic show being staged by its cousins.
The hawk is three times the size of the mocking bird
and would make more than twenty hummingbirds.
Their protests more annoyance than a real threat.

It is really a win-win situation. The hawk
finally finishes its meal and gracefully
pushes off from the pole.
The two turf patrollers follow a decent distance
then return to their nested mates
having repulsed a threat to home-nest security.

Dusk on Mt. Helix

Out on the patio
the dark shadows of Eucalyptus trees
stand as stubborn sentinels
against the gathering fire in the west.
The first star, it's Jupiter, steps out
into the deepening twilight and
the horizon edges into a dark lavender.
As the cinders in the west die
the day has its last blooming.

The chill of a Mt. Helix evening quickly descends.
Spiders have constructed the evening's work for survival,
nets flung down from the joists overhead
to the jade plants lining the patio edge.
Their tracing silk strands, backlit by fading light,
Glow like phosphor lace.

A moment occurs like that just before sleep.
I stand in the dark thinking of a boy.
A boy, hand on chin, leaning on the balcony rail of a porch
waiting, looking up into the immense Missouri night
humid with cornfields and seeing the stars
semaphoring their mysterious messages.

The Buddha on Mount Helix

Just up Alto Drive
Toward Helix summit
Sits a Buddha in his
Dimlit garden-house
Calmly meditating
On shovels and hoes,
Potting soil and compost mix.
This is not the blue haired
Prince Sakymuni,
But the full-fleshed
Mature soul, relaxed
With one knee drawn up,
Foot on the ground,
Resting his arm lightly
On the raised leg.
This is the Buddha who
Could break out laughing
At any moment
And while his expression
Is contained, he has the air
Of a man possessing
An enormously funny joke,
Who would tell it
In a minute
If he thought
We would understand.
They say Buddha sits
On the exact spot
Where the Earth's axis turns
And holds, by sheer force
Of his will,
All things in existence,
Opening and closing
The gates of Nirvana.
Yes!
Right here
In La Mesa
On Alto Drive.

The Buddha on Alto Drive

He is all head
His huge ears hang like flat eggplants
The lobes spread out across his shoulders like epaulets.
The sensuous mouth
Wide and about to smile.
The broad nose is almost Negroid.
The rest of him is all belly.
Hands rest on horizontal shins
Bracketing the legs and fingers point
To the earth at his side.
The eyes are closed in meditation, not sleep.
He is not a Western saint with lidless eyes
He sees lucidly by looking inward.
The forehead smooth and bald,
No wrinkles wrought by worry or worldly cares.

This is the peaceful Buddha
At the moment of his oneness
Under the Bodhi-tree.
The Universe filling him with light and mirth
In spite of also placing all the world's suffering on his soul.

Being filled he is also of ample girth
And large extravagant features.
Yet next to the ground!
No part of Buddha is far from the earthly soil.
He is rooted.

You might think this is the laughing Buddha.
But no! This is the Buddha who knows
The joke is on him!
Enlightenment has revealed this.
He looks as if he could break out laughing at any moment.
Yet he only possesses this secret:
The joke is on him and you and me.
If we could understand this we also
Might look in possession of laughter without silliness,
Without the pain of humor.

Lizards

All spring I heard them
Scurry in the litter
Beneath the jade plants
Avoiding me as I
Sat on the patio,
A rustle among the ivy leaves,
A pulse flashed from agave trunks,
A streak across the rock garden.

In summer I would
Sometime glimpse them,
Athletes doing push-ups
In the green shadows,
Their rosy neck-sacks
Pulsing.

Now that nights are colder
I'd have thought they'd slowed
By torpor of reptilian blood.
Not so. Yesterday in the heat
Of a Santa Ana I saw them
Through an opening
In their jade-bower,
Defying the curse
That spoiled another Garden,
One mounted above the other,
Their tapered tails
Entwined in a knot
Of mottled desire.
I stopped, transfixed
By the ancient ritual,
Its clutching necessity.
At my shadow
They fell apart,
A slip-knot divesting itself,
A wild trembling.

The Snake

Walking the road
that curves up Helix,
I'm startled by a brown snake
Coiled beside the asphalt,
as if sunning itself.
But one step further on
I see the fly already settled
on a lidless eye. Still
I'm drawn to this mottled
perfection, the smooth rounded head,
the long taper of power.
Even in death
the snake was beautiful.
Not viperous
but a "good snake,"
according to our
human way of judging
these things, now
limp and impotent.
I turned to go down the hill.
In the gathering dusk
every tree and house
stood in sharp detail.
I imagined
the birds and ground squirrels,
chittering around me,
quietly rehearsing: all is well,
all is well.
Why then the tears in my eyes?
All is well.
The living and the dead,
all is well,
the living, the dying.
All is well.

Community

After painting my house
All residents seemed disoriented
Perhaps the frenetic buzz of scraping,
Washing and caulking
And the change in color
Upset their world.
Favorite entrances of spiders
And ants were closed
The odor altered
Trails covered over
I noticed colonies of ants
Milling around an electrical box
As if evicted
Web sites in the corners
Long used by generations
Of spider families
Now appear abandoned
Shadowed nooks and crannies
Of patio beams and fascia boards
Are now exposed in light colors
Prospective tenants are not lining up
For the new refurbished tenements
Neighborhood cats who regularly patrol
My yard and crawl-space vents
Have deserted their rounds
Even roly bugs who crossed
My patio on their mysterious missions
Are gone.
The family of white-striped
Night-cats, mother and kits,
Who circumambulate my house
As if it were a Southern California Kaaba
Are nowhere in evidence
Since it was given a new exterior.
How forlorn my house
In its new yellow dress.
Even the hummingbirds aren't harvesting
The Bird of Paradise flowers
framing my office wall window.

I haven't heard the mice who
occasionally took refuge in my attic
And their field cousins
Foraging for macadamias in the ice-plant
Have taken off for other Elysian Fields.
The faithful skink who monitors my garage door
Has deserted his post and the occasional coyotes
Who use my driveway as one of their urban shortcuts
No longer leave their droppings on my front yard.

I alone sit in my bright house
Bereft of comforts and inconveniences
Of familiar residents and visitors,
The satisfying fit of beings in their places,
Doing what they must do, making their little livings,
Intruding into, preying upon and demanding from
The others who share their domicile.
An ecology of mutual existence interrupted.

My House

Many doors in my house
have been closed for years.
I'm opening new doors,
breezes and small spirits are invited,
new paintings appear on the walls
with asserting colors, nudes, pots and pans.
Nights have become fragrant.

Ants have come in, roving bits of rusty sunlight
scouting my bathroom sink
for occasional bits of toothpaste or soap.
Welcome.

The yard is coming inside.
A vineyard has sprung up with ripe grapes.
Windows invite so much in
after being shuttered so long.
Walls can't contain the inflation.

Green beetles of June,
drunk on figs and lemon trees,
careen through the vines,
strange luminous creatures.
I am mad to be wandering among them.

Living in this new world,
I watch the ants and June Bugs to see
what they do once they have bitten into
the communion of toothpaste and figs.
I will do what they do.

The Oak Tree

The argument occurred in the kitchen,
an appropriate place
for a swift violent exchange
with symbolic knives dueling.

Leaving, wounded,
Driving around.
No where to go.
At the office, staring out the window,
an oak tree, in a line of oak trees
planted on the Esso Refinery lawn,
smaller than the others.
Branches twitched to get my attention.
Survivor of annual back-to-back hurricanes,
knocked over twice and each time
propped up with steel guy-wires.
A long gash exposed the under-bark
the length of the stunted trunk-belly.
Roots, with toes dug in, were
sutured sandal-straps fastened
precariously to the quivering Louisiana soil.

A voice, suggested by multiple half-moon mouths
the color of skin, a hundred leaves quaking, its
trunk-soul pushing up her wind to my ear:
“RR, you are sustained in being.”
Weird a doomed tree word-numbing,
balm warm layer over cooling over warm,
uprooted wounded being affirming being,
the random water, root-feet pulling from dirt,
sap leaking spilled out, ebbing over ebbing.
“How do you know, Tree?” I whispered.
“Just look.” It said.

Memories

Humid nights crowd into my bedroom
with the sweet odor of lilacs,
the rasping love-songs of crickets
keeping me awake waiting for dad
to come wish me goodnight.
After working all day he smells
of gasoline and tobacco,
the wonderful perfume of
a father's mysterious world..
He whisks me, rubbing
a day's growth, cheek to my cheek,
giving me permission to sleep.

On Chicago's west side,
in an old abandoned seminary dorm
converted into living quarters,
my wife, three sons and I,
have the luxury of two rooms
with double-decker metal beds.
Listening to the Eisenhower Expressway,
a twenty-four hour torrent pouring
its grinding energy into our sanctuary,
we wait for morning call
to test our intent once more.

In the courtyard of a Chinese Patriarch's
house, bats dive and swoop
between the pillars and under the eaves,
their wings like tiny leather purses.
We eat little cakes and drink tea
honoring the August moon.
I leave the circle of lights and friends,
remembering,
the hot nights of childhood
laden with their familiar odors.
I am far from home.

December 1941

An early memory
Standing in the bathroom
Watching my father shave
I ask
Dad, who is going to win the war?
We will win, he said.
How do you know?
Because God is on our side.
A reply meant to satisfy
A seven year old's question.
But, then he paused.
No, that's not true, he said,
I don't know. Our enemies also pray.
God doesn't take sides.

For the rest of his life
My father never spoke much of God.
If God doesn't take sides
Is impartial
Cannot decide
How can prayers be answered?
Maybe God didn't know who will win.
Maybe he didn't care
Or couldn't control the war.
Maybe God struggles with good and evil
Just as we do.

With string I outline Okinawa
On my living room floor.
The troops invade, the battle rages.
Headlines number the dead in thousands.
In the morning I eat my Wheaties and toast.
In the afternoon, Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy,
Is winning in every episode.
And we insist the All-German-Boy
And the All-Japanese-Boy surrender.

God is on our side, we say.
Everyone claims the good.
The winners decide the good.

A child wonders and watches
Dark clouds hover
Evil rides a powerful horse
Infernos are ignited in the villages
The kingdoms rage and vie with one another
God's chosen are slaughtered
And over all is written
An awesome punctuation
Loosed on the world
In the shape of a lowly mushroom.

My Father said, I don't know,
We'll have to see.
The only thing my Father ever said to me about God,
The wisest thing my Father ever said to me,
I don't know. I don't know.

Mother

**You had a portrait taken
Coiffed ala Clara Bow
Wearing a long dress, high heels
And a fox fur.
You don't smile,
Only the fox
Has a gleam in his eye.**

My Father at Age 78

Our four parents sit on the couch,
my wife and I kneel in front on the floor
with faces staring at the camera.
My father is receding into the background.
He sits behind my wife,
his arm draped across the armrest,
veined hand extended,
pushing him backward into the cushions,
his face drawn and pale.
The rest of us grin and pose
oblivious of his leaving.

To Ian

**When you were one day old
Ma me mi mo
I held you close to me
Ma me mi mo
So you could get my smell
Ma me mi mo
And I yours. And I gave you:
Ma me mi mo
To be our favorite song
Ma me mi mo
A secret code for years
Ma me mi mo
To say what words cannot.**

Blue

**Amelie Blue is holding Court
In the House of Rippel
Laughing like Buddha
Seated between two
Princes of the realm
Who can't contain their joy
At the Princess of the Line.
She shine
She beam
She laugh
She reign
She royal
She Blue!**

Matthew

Watching you sleep
twelve hours newly arrived
a bundle of now
I hold you in my arms
our first introduction.
You aren't impressed,
sleeping, ignoring all the fuss
of parents, brother,
grandparents and relatives.

In ten years I'll be seventy-seven
and you will have
mastered the essentials of your culture.
I, on the other hand, will have accelerated
the process of taking my leave
from this enigmatic water-wheel.

If, God willing, I'm here
for your twentieth anniversary
we will celebrate, you and I,
still mysteries, you and I,
despite our long acquaintance.

Epitaph

My friend Stanley said,
"I only borrowed this dust."
I hope he doesn't mind
If I borrow his line,
And add a thought from Blake
for an epitaph's sake.
What made this dust dance
I do not know,
sometimes Joy
and sometimes Woe.

Being

To be or, not to be....Hamlet

Do to be, do to be....RR

Be to do, be to do.... Ortega y Gassett

Do be do be dooo.... Sinatra

Don't do, to be....Buddha

Do Tao, to be....Lao Tzu

Die to be....Jesus

Do as I do, to be....Kung Fu Tse

Do dharma, to be....Bhrama

All is doodoo....Qoheleth

It Goes On

Life goes on the way it goes on
Until, one day The Hunter of Souls
Appears at our house and knocks on the door,
And asks, "Is my son here? Is my daughter in this place?
Have you seen my child,
Who looks like this and acts like that?"

And we answer, "No we have not seen anyone here,
Who looks like this and acts like that!
Maybe you could ask at the next dwelling place
For the one you seek."

But The Hunter will cry,
"O my son, oh my daughter
Come back with me to your Home, dwell there with me,
And it will go on for us as it goes on."

Adapted from an African Story

First Love

You visit me again, giving me
pleasure of old memories.
Muse of my awakening
sweet ache of unrequited love
and lost opportunities
never realized in my
so-called reality.
You bring back to me
Mother, Roberta, Grandpa, Lucy,
other regrets. Bittersweet.
How could I ever thank you
I could call you Eternal Woman
or Feminine Principle or Anima
that is so cold
when you are so warm.

COURTSHIP

I had the Hot Ziggities for you.
You, a butterfly, a morsel of piano keys,
A bug-eyed reformer.
I had the H.Z.'s you had hot pants.
Energy was flowing, followed the flow.
Bug-eyed hot pants new worlds to explore
Old Weary Blues no longer enough follow those
Wide eyed naive wonder struck fickle wandering butter flown
flying fuck Hot Ziggities.
Everything was neatly folded, tucked into your hat band,
A small universe of correct keys for every circumstance.
Investigating the forbidden, we stumbled upon
The taboos that led Adam and Eve to violate tribal traditions
And be thrown out of Delight into a world
Strange beyond their imagined naming exercises, their little reasons,
Their familiar gods.
Journey forth honest about figs and fig-leaves.
The discovery of discipline as a needed quality.
Thought, Hot Ziggity
This will be neat at last: Discipline and the Weary Blues.
A love hate thing that's hard to lose.
Endearments, gratefulness and compliments aplenty
Caught me back to a childhood of praise.
This must be It, Hot Ziggity drew me in
Like a moth to peanut butter
Hot Ziggity was the Key, follow the energy.
Quality of Hot Ziggity was there, even in your hair.
A freshness that was away with the Weary Tired
Give me the Hot Ziggity
Who cares if we really find anything
Not the formula or the creed, It's the unknown unknown
That's the thing, Hot Ziggity packaged in naive
Black and White. Bent on destruction
Of the piano key rigid universe and the Weary Blues.
Quality time, no time for reflections,
Hot Ziggity time!
Balancing precariously on a psychotic edge
A magnet for Weary Blues and Hot Ziggity.

At The Same Time

You jumped me last night.
In the midst of our usual pattern
Inviting the goddess to possess us
Drawing out the lingering pleasure of love-making,
Suddenly you dumped me on my back,
Straddled me,
Grasped me between your legs,
And we quickly came together.
A first, I think,
In sixteen years
Of love-making
And we laughed
At our surprise
It was so funny,
The coming together,
So over-rated,
And all the hype for it
Made it rather laughable and sad,
At the same time.

Anniversary

If my parents are any guide, each year
I pass the anniversary of my death
Sometime between January 26
And the first of February.
A time of deeper than usual depression
And introspection marked
By thoughts of Polycarp, Mildred, Kenneth and Malcolm.
I observe it is the time of my
Younger brother's first coronary incident.
My sons, heirs of melancholy, live in distant cities
Reinforcing thoughts of Wills and Trusts.
Dreaded death exercises prescient power
Creating an annual rehearsal
Of anticipated memory alongside past memorials.

We are told by the Oracle
"No one knows the hour of his death."
Yet each moment we decide what to do in the next
In the light of the whole of our life.

The projection from the present
Contains the expectation of our Days
And thus our Anniversary is celebrated.

The Not Easy

It shouldn't be there
No place for a city
Between two swamps
A river and a lake
Altitude minus three feet
Hordes of mosquitoes and
Other undesirables,
Tourists, Rednecks, and arty types
Crowd in with Creoles, Cajuns,
And scions of old plantation gentry.
If it wasn't for the Roosevelt hotel
You couldn't get an honest drink
In the whole town.
Instead watered down liquor
Two percent beer and the ever present Sazerac
Always available like trinkets
Thrown from Rex and Comus.
Oysters used to be okay
But now are imported from Seattle.
There are redeeming features:
Good Music and the Garden District
But finding either is
Not Easy.

The Ideal Meal

Friends seated round an octagonal table
Elsie, Basil, Marie, Joe Hsu, Annie and Joe M
Long ivory chopsticks at each setting
Red lacquered chinaware
Plates, saucers, cups
Dishes of Hunan ham, special eggs
Steamed rice, vegetables, sweet meats
Fr. Elmer serves collared greens
Turnips, okra pods,
Pauline pours garlic-laced vinegar over
Broccoli and romaine
Jim C swipes sprouted grain bread
Through the olive oil bowl
Eddie O opens a Pinot Noir
At exactly 62.5 F into a tulip glass
Patty slices the Wonder cheese
A bottle of Lustau Solera Sherry nearby
Betsy brings out a tray with
A lumpia-taco-dim-sum-eggroll-bagel creation
Mickey serves savory pot roast and Jambalaya
And I add blood sausage with green peppers
Wrapped in an Italian mini loaf roll
Aaahh, it were paradise enow.

Easter

It was the women who
 Discovered the empty tomb.
The men thought they were hysterical.
 The feminine appropriated risen-ness.

When the men finally “understood”
 What had happened had happened,
They tried to *understand*
 And we got bishops and creeds.

And what was it He desired?
 And how was that different from
What He wanted? Desire
 Being always not a matter of want.

Thursday Night

**After much deliberation
He faces his pending death
Celebrating with his
Uncomprehending colleagues.**

**Life is illumined
in the bread and wine.
One task still ahead,
the act to be planned,
tactics to be worked out
if only, the enabler
is crafty and skilled.**

The Woman at the Well

He said, "Woman, woman, Where is your husband?
And I know everything you've ever done."
She said, "Rude Man, rude man, Ain't got no husband.
And you don't know ever thing I ever done."
He said, "Woman, woman, You've had five husbands.
And the one you got now, he's not your own."

On her way back to the village
A welcome-wagon of local wives
Came out to greet her.
I've got good news, said the Woman
Arriving from the well.

This rude man told me my life is Good
He done told me I can live my life!

That's swell, dearrie, said the mayor's wife
As she stooped over to pick up a stone.

Religion

As a child
I was taught
God is X
No Y no Z

As a youth
I had thought
God is three
X Y and Z

As a man
I have sought
But God is not
X, Y or Z

No one knows
Ought of God
Yea or nay
Or X, or Y, or Z

They Say

They say
He spoke an ancient language
Not the Greek recorded

They say
His native speech
Words sounds grammar
Cadence nuances and humor
Is dead

They say
No one knows
The world his tongue
Created

They say
Its no problem
We have translated him
We can trust what
They say

They say
We can translate back to
What was said in Aramaic
Scholars could do that
They say

Is it the same
I ask
Are the worlds created by language
So interchangeable

They say
It's just as well
This way
He is more amenable to our world
He is inviolate sealed off
Unapproachable inconsequential

**This way
He says
What we say
He says**

The i Dialogues

well God, i say,
its about illness, death and suffering.
do you really know what you're doing,
are you really almighty?

"That's a hard one sweet pie."
(where she gets that i'll never guess.)
"IAM is the Package you get,
An axiomatic consequence of the way it is
You know:
The order of things
Providential circumstance
Evolutionary necessity
Original sin and natural law."

come on God i said get real.

"Now sweet buns," she says,
"To put it frankly, as in candid,
IAM's giving it all to you
Giving you the full treatment, no less, sweet one,
It's all one ball of wax.
All is yours, you get it all,
No halvies no seconds,
ALL ALL ALL
You get the whole catastrophe."

you don't have to get so upset,
that's my point, i don't want the whole catastrophe.
i don't want a universe where loved ones die
or innocent children suffer.

"Is that it, sweet pea?"

yes, I'm angry.
i've always suspected you didn't know what you're doing
you never ask anyone for advice
and you ignore input.
you're so damned insecure,
always insisting 'no other gods' before you

big deal! maybe one of the other deities would do a better job.
you don't seem willing to give them a chance.
what are you thinking about?

“Well hold on sweet cakes, do you need reminding
IAM Who IAM.
Consult my friend Job,
Or, to paraphrase one of your
So-called, self-made auto magnates,
In my Capacity there are two Immutable Requirements,
One for me and one for you:
IAM never explains
And you have no complaints.

GOD'S BACKSIDE

...And Moses said to the Lord, "Show me your Glory." The Lord replied, "No man has seen me and lived, but if you stand in this cleft as I pass by I will lift my hand from your eyes and you will see my back parts." Exo33:18..

When Job screwed up his courage
And asked God to explain himself,
What God showed Job was His backside!

His behemoth butt,
His leviathan gluteous maximus,
His Holy arse!

Of course. Of course
God has His shadow side.
The backside where we all
Shove away those things
We don't want to see of ourselves.

And when Job saw it
He saw something even God himself hadn't
Seen of His own reality.
Job's stubbornness became
The occasion of change for God.

God was changed by His
Encounter with Job just as
Job was transformed by his
Encounter with God.

Nothing could be more dangerous
Than a God who is out-of-touch
With His own reality.

Only the transformation of God
Gives purpose to existence.

Missing Halo

The thirteen men dressed in classical Roman garb
are seated behind a low table
all facing the same direction and,
notwithstanding that odd arrangement,
most of them are engaged
in animated conversation with their neighbors
as if filling time before
the studio photographer gets the lens adjusted
to the weird lighting
resulting from the golden back-glow
surrounding the heads of twelve.

Conspicuous by the absence of light
around his head, the figure on the far right
sits tensely clutching his purse
and stares with hurt eyes
at the man seated in the middle
who is extending his hands to food on the table
as if to say, "Why don't we eat?"

On the floor, in front of the table
at the feet of the apparent host,
is a woman prostrate, her face buried on his ankle.
No one is paying her any attention.
Her hands massage the man's feet
with the hair of her head.
An erotic electricity fills the room;
The host has spilled his goblet of wine.

Intimacy

A price is paid
bargaining with the Transcendent.
A Curse on your life,
a cutting off,
severing from others
a wound inflicted.

The Gift is a new threshold,
an interface for heroic work,
a direction unanticipated,
intimacy with The Way It is.

The Reading

When you recited
With your intense voice
Poetry of the injustice
Done by white men
To native peoples, listing
Stolen elections,
Samoza, landlords and
Bannana economics,
The rape of Indian women,
Genocide of Mayas and Araucas,
You came at last to the domination
Of Nicaragua by the U.S.
I sat in the dimlit
Café on 5th Avenue
Oppressed by the weight of
Five-hundred years.
Outside, a bleary-eyed bum
Sat on the curb and looked in
As you stood in your dark sweater
And rust colored skirt
And spoke youe blood-tinged words,
Your words each a knife
Thrusting out from your solitude.
Had you glanced up you might have seen
The earth-stubble of his look.
You might have seen him.
And paused,
And then gone on, in that dimlit room
Filled with coffee smells and poets,
A new timbre in your voice.

Luce

You, a breath of Brazil
Equatorial heat
The hint of something darker,
Shadows of Fado
Hidden in the light

Far from warmth and tragedies
Of your Amazonia coast with its
Old world beauty and new world passions
You carry the tension
Of a Carioca living in the cold North.
Creature of light, you are Luce.
Shining out where it gets dark at five o'clock,
You don't get going til two in the morning.
Your candle burns, not in the work-a-day world,
But in week ends of song and late night
Searches for...for what? Your own true self
And for a soul-mate to reflect the light
You carelessly fling into the darkness around you.

You know I have loved you.
You know, had I not been wounded and cautious
That flowers music and dancing could have carried
A love, not wise, for a time, in the spell of your light,
Where guitars cast magic, where practical life
Is ignored in the flurry of dancing and
Heated kisses, letting down your hair
And your guard and stepping into my arms.
Passion as fleeting and illusory as Carnival.

Why Do You Do What You Do

**You do it
Because**

**Mama says so
They told you not to
Everybody does it
You need the \$
You want love
It's your duty
It's beautiful
She wants it
They want it
You want an orderly universe
You can
It feels good
It's the necessary deed
For Jesus
Ad majorum Deo glorium**

The Great American Poem

Just as you begin to hear the
Faltering sounds trying to break into
Your awareness you pick up a volume of poems
And there it is: Someone else has written your poem.
The poem about how your generation
Is dying one by one, loved ones and acquaintances
Slipping over the edge, gone or going.
Or how the world hangs for each of us at its epicenter,
And our knowing anything is so tenuous,
Words obstinate as a sack of wet stones.

Relativity

I'm walking
I visualize I'm standing
At the center of my universe
A truth that is self-evident.
With each step the ground ahead
Moves toward me
A small exertion pushes it behind
The Earth rotates under me on its distant axis.
An exhilaration of great power
Surges over me

Up ahead I see my friend
Walking towards me
With each step the distance
Between us closes
I see that from his center
The Earth is being pushed
Behind him in the opposite
Rotation to that I am creating
Yet the ground between us
Does not split apart

The distance between us dwindles
Even as his center
Comes to coincide with mine
We move the Earth in opposing directions
How can this be
With all the individual centers pushing and tugging
At the world simultaneously
It is a wonder
The Earth doesn't get confused
We are living in the same world
Yet it seems people
Never see an issue the same way
Without ripping their world apart

Solstice

You understand
The world is some kind of contraption
Cobbled out of light, dust, huge explosions
And other pediments
All held together by the glue of words.

Just because the sun isn't swallowed
By the southern darkness and begins its return
Every year doesn't mean it has to be that way.

Things go wrong with 'made things,'
A bolt here, a nut there, a loose string.
Living here isn't for the faint-hearted.

Nocturne

Late evening
Melodies of Chopin
Fill the air
With their measured cadence
Nocturnes
So deliberate

A riderless horse
Trembles in a moonlit garden
Heavy with honeysuckle
Hoof-falls in the dewed grass
The white muzzle
Touches the surface of a dark pool
Silent ripples of silver spread
Arcs which shatter on the black edge
Sprinkling the shallows with
Fragments of the moon

The night swallows the music
There are caverns
Recesses where we sit
Waiting
There is no music there

The Night Sky Goes Dark

You can't, you stars.
It's impossible to shine back
To the very center
When, at the edges, your
Flight goes faster and faster
Exceeding thought itself. You fall
Off the edge and nothing returns.
The sky is black except
For stragglers still on their way
Bravely sending lonely signals
Someone might decipher someday
Before they too, go over
To the other side.

You Be the Rock

I'll be the rock you be the water
You have found my vein, you are the rain
I'll be the ore you be the pickaxe
Strike break crush my treasure
I'll dissolve, you carry me away
Heavier than water is heavy
You be the rock.

River

I the river you the fish
You have found my source you are rain
I the ferry you the tiller
You shove you push you riverbank
I calm water now rapids
flood rudder's amok
fountain sand crystal and fire
ash char sex born wasp desire

Ghazal

**Fiesta stepping out of place
Recovers mundane daily grace**

**Four priests circle the baptismal font
Chanting and crossing the demons out**

**Birthday marking meaning
Signifies the year's living**

**In the closet behind the door
Opens up the vast interior**

**Dropping out of ordinary time
Creates the true life sublime**

Dream

**In night shadows
When the Earth is bone still
Just before dawn
In half slumber dreams come
Taking me down into dark water
My flesh fish-like
Scales lifted by the cold current
Sensing some ancient reptilian presence
In the darkness. I cry out
And wake
To the other dream.**

Fisher

Gigging flounder in Destin
At night, wading the shallow bay
Armed with lantern and spear,
Looking for that elusive fish
Whose eyes have rolled up
To stare lidless at a watery sky.
I walk blindly,
In the center
Of a lonely bubble of light
Pressed down by the surrounding dark.
Water rises to my knees
My bare feet stirring
The soft mud of the bay-floor.
A warm Florida night
Goes cold;
I am far from the shore
A man delving into dark waters
Not thinking of fish at all.

Time and Myth

In time all things become blurred.
Even time itself,
history,
the stories we tell
move back and forth,
shifting dunes of words
covering old interpretations,
exposing unknown fragments,
producing new stories,
undermining old heroes,
raising questions,
answers.
Even so
the Myths cling tenaciously.
For some they take on the stature
of revealed Truth,
providing facts and proofs
for our cherished prejudices.
Thus, we maintain our
Christs, Buddhas, gods and God.

The 1930's

**The cars were always shiny
The horses buff
Only the people scruffy
And down on their luck**

**Flash-asides to the
Not so fortunate
Shown in black and grey
A nation in disarray**

**Struggling to get back
On economic feet
Choosing as champion
The Biscuit none defeat.**

Lament

Raise sounds of joy
Make the noise of rejoicing
Rend our clothes in sorrow
Put on rags of lamenting.

The life given is returning
O Root of Life.

Blessed are you O Lord our God
Do not afflict us in excess
Or grieve us beyond our capacity
Blessed is your name, O Holy Root.

You guide our souls in ascent
Keep us safe from the Powers
That would retard our progress
Bring us safely to our Home Place

All belongs to you, O Root of Life.
All returns to you, Fount of Every Expression.
The body dissolves, its burden released.
The Root of All receives back its loan of dust,
And once more is made whole.

The cycle turns,
That which seeks fulfillment and completion
Retrieves the wandering exile back to its Root Place,
And momentarily, achieves Rest,
Before renewing its Eternal Quest.

We look on in awe and wonderment.
And life once more goes on
The way it goes on.

Take Back the Books

**Take back your holy Books.
They obscure, confuse;
create division and strife.**

**They don't reveal You,
only our projections.**

**To have a self is to have a god.
To have a god is to possess a self-understanding.
To have a self-understanding is to know
which god we serve,
obey, praise, trust,
value and love.**

**O Lord give us
Yourself,
Your lively Reality,
not Your Books,
Your scriptures, so-called.**

Give us, O God, instead, Your Presence.

Answer to Buddha

**To desire is to be alive.
Fulfilled desire is joy.
Unfulfilled desire is misery.
Don't get rid of desire, that's nonsense.
Have right desire.**

The Star-Shine

**Oh, my companions
On this Journey!
Is not the star-shine
Weeping to the
Right and left of us
Spilling out their
Existence in such
Extravagance!**

Pee

The older I get
The more I splatter.
My aim is straight
But it doesn't matter.

The bold arc of youth
Now just a dribble.
Manners and couth
Demand: be a sitter.

O to pee like before,
Flailing about as firemen show.
A golden stream and more,
The gift of flow and go.

Morning Prayer

O Great Spirit
We do not know the Good.
You know our true need
Before we ask.
Bestow that which is for our Good
And for our true need.
Help us embrace the creation as Good.
Keep us in the widest knowledge of your compassion.
Create in us the consciousness that was in
Jesus
Buddha
Lao Tzu.

What Has Come

**The Fabulous Yonder
Horizon of Horizons
The Sauntering Walk
Recovery of The Sacred
God's Imperial Rule
The True Reality
The Kingdom of God
The Truly Human
Good News!**

71 Years as an Individual of My Species

Declared alive at 9:45 AM, CST, 26 December 1934.
Won the DNA Lottery about nine months earlier.
Odds against winning were overwhelming.
Perhaps one in 10 to the 10th power raised to the 10th power
As estimated by some genetic mathematician.
As of the above time my chance at existence became 100%,
A probability of one.
One slip of a single gene at a crucial nexus
And someone else would have shown up, not me!
Hot Ziggity. I got me one chance to live a life!
71 years old today.

Poem For Roz and Jim's Wedding

When you made room for me
in your world
I didn't know that two
could fit into one
even though
an infinity exists between
one and the other.
That's what scared me.
Now I see what mathematicians
have said since Euclid
invented the point.
Within one is an infinity,
a space for compassion and love
so large even our fears cannot diminish it.

So, dearest one,
welcome to your cherished
space within my world.
Welcome to love and music,
comfort and ease,
strife and struggle,
talk and silence,
joy and woe.
Welcome to responsibility
for our co-existing solitude.

Welcome to that place
which neither of us
has really to deserve
but is the free gift
of our decision
made once and for all,
yet again and again
and again
and again
and again.....

Skin

**Skin flakes
a major source
of dust in the house.
Skin, clothing of
The body divine.
That's why I love
getting into bed
surrounded by myself.**

A World Dies

When language dies
the words have disappeared
into the rocks.
No one remains to hear or
create those precious sounds.
But echoes are there
in stones, plants and water
if we listen
patiently.
But we fawn over
the insanities of TV evangelists
and authorities of our own making,
oblivious to the worlds' dying.

Utopia Has Arrived

Well, now that the country's being run by
a macho, militaristic, ruthless, business-knows-best Cabal,
we do-good, egalitarian, liberals can relax.
The private sector now includes the government.
There is no distinction
between public and private (even individual's) funds.
Private sector (read corporations) compassion
will take care of the down-trodden
and poverty-stricken members of society
(by operations of the 'Hidden Hand' of capitalism).
We liberals are no longer needed or relevant.
Father (the strict father) knows best.
Nurture in all forms has proven ineffective
in the world of Real-Politic. From now on
it's every man (and woman) for him (or her) self.
And, of course, one-on-one private charity
will see to it that no one falls behind or actually starves
or lacks for individual gifts necessary to get them through the
day.
And, of course, the recipients will be grateful!

The Fat Lady Sings A

**All names of God have vowels.
In all of the holy Names
A is the vowel of choice
found most frequently.**

**And you, the Fat Lady,
you are the Buddha.
When you sing all creation pauses to listen!
And all Song praises the A.**

How To Make A Universe

**Start with
A few elementary particles
Stir in energy.
Charge some positive,
Some negative,
Others neutral.
Permit vibrations
In all modes
At any frequency
But set an upper limit
On speed.
Add uncertainty
As to simultaneity.**

**Mix well.
Give it Time.
Let it evolve.
Observe.
Don't interfere.**

**Have space
For the results
Provide exits
For overflows.**

**If things collapse
Or expand beyond control
Start over
With a new recipe.**

Advice for Ian

**Are you small, thin? Yes.
Keep a valiant heart,
you have many advantages.
Look at the large.
Have compassion for them.
Something has left them
with a big emptiness
they are trying to fill.**

**You, on the other hand,
acquire a large heart,
an expansive mind.**

**Do not envy
largeness.
Stay flexible
in body and spirit.**

My Neighbor's Cat

My neighbor's cat
Patrols my yard daily
Looking for what cats look for
An open door
Traces of creatures
Who have been here before
A chance encounter with prey
A spot of sun or shade
Another cat
Or the unwary bird.
Hope of catching something
Seems like a priority
For this cat, whose name I do not know
And who I have never gotten
Close enough to touch.

Shy but curious
I often see him watching me
If I approach or surprise him
He quickly retreats to another lookout
On the fence or my garage roof.
Today I saw him stalking
Along the bed of Gardenias
Lining my front yard
Alternate advances punctuated
By long low-crouched pauses
As he apparently had something
In his view-finders.
Suddenly he darted around a date palm
Leaping up the trunk about three feet
Catches a small lizard with a paw
And in the same movement
Transfers the prey to his mouth
And lands on all four feet
The lizard dangling
As he calmly proceeds to walk
Around the corner of the house.

I don't expect to find the lizard

Dropped as an offering at my back door
As this cat is assuredly
A one-person feline.
Perhaps my neighbor will come home
To a token of her pet's loyalty.

I reported this to my neighbor
Who said he loves to bring his finds home
But the cat has a very 'soft mouth'
And nine times out often
When he drops his prey be it lizard, mouse or bird
The 'catch' scurries off unhurt
Disinterested hunter ignoring his recent victim

Despite such generosity
Towards his quarries
Rodents, ground squirrels
And gophers who might find
My grape vines a likely temptation
Are nowhere to be found thanks to
My neighbor's cat.

A STORY...How Certainty Was Avoided

Once upon a time, once before a time, once beyond a time,
In the beginning of time, at the end of time,
There was a beautiful garden.

A creation to be sure of *The Way It Is*.

In the garden were all creatures *The Way It Is* had made
Including, the Ones with Words.
Now, *The Way It Is* was pleased with the Ones with Words
And asked them to name the other creatures
Or so the Worded ones said:
“*It is up to us to Word the world.*”
Of all the creatures
The Ones with Words
Took most delight in the garden.
In each other and in *The Way It Is*.
“*We are modeled after The Way It Is itself,*”
They said. And began
Setting about the task
Of Wording things with relish.
With a sense of purpose and of being special.

An assumption to be sure, but who could blame them?

In the cool of the evening *The Way It Is*
Would stroll through the garden
Admiring all that had been made.
On occasion the Ones with Words
Would encounter *The Way It Is*.
Other than noting the hair on their necks
Prickling outward, a slight tension
In the bowels, or a flush of heat on earlobes,
The Wording Ones thought nothing unusual
About meeting *The Way It Is*.

Indeed, the ones with Words
Began to feel a kinship with *The Way It Is*
In caring for the garden and its creatures.

Their Wording of the world gave them
An experience of power and partnership.

A presumption to be sure, but who could blame them?

Now in the center of the Garden
The Way It Is had placed a TOKOGAE tree
Which had beautiful leaves
And tempting fruit.

The Way It Is called the fruit of the TOKOGAE tree
'Certainty,' and indeed, it was a very attractive fruit,
But not possible to digest.
Or so it was said of

The consumption, to be sure, but who would question it?

Of all the trees in the garden
The Ones with Words could eat the fruit of any tree,
Except the fruit of the TOKOGAE tree.
For it was said that if you ate that fruit
You would become like *The Way It Is*
And you would surely die!

A speculation to be sure, but who could blame them?

One of the creatures *The Way It Is* had made was
Venomous Danger.
Now Venomous Danger was most attractive to the Ones with Words.
And of all the creatures of the garden
Venomous Danger was the most curious and skeptical.
He spent his days in the garden
Speculating about *The Way It Is* and how things worked.
Venomous Danger hungered for wisdom and 'Certainty'
But was afraid to eat the Forbidden Fruit.

But determined to be sure, for who would blame him?

Now, of all the creatures *The Way It Is* had made
The Ones with Words were most vain and gullible.
They liked the Venomous Danger.
Venomous Danger was so handsome
And he had verve and style.
The Wording Ones wished for similar dash
Instead of spending their time naming things.
The Ones with Words were seduced by Venomous Danger.
'Certainty' looked attractive
Hanging there for the taking.

A temptation to be sure, but who could blame them?

So when the Venomous Danger suggested

That they should eat some 'Certainty'
The Wordy Ones were beguiled.
'Certainty' looked good. Very good.
They took a bite of 'Certainty'
But 'Certainty' was bitter, bitter.

With the taste of 'Certainty' still in their mouths
The Ones with Words saw they had to hide.
Hide from *The Way It Is*. But *The Way It Is*
Came walking through the garden in the cool of the day,
And they were terrified!

A premonition to be sure, but who could blame them?

**"Have you eaten the fruit of the TOKOGAE tree
Which was forbidden to you?"**
The Ones with Words could not look at *The Way It Is*
And tried to pass the buck.
*"But the Venomous Danger You gave us
Made us want 'Certainty'."*

A recrimination to be sure, but can you blame them?

"Out! Out!
You think you can grasp *The Way It Is*?
You will never know how things work with certainty.
The Way It Is cannot be separated into categories
That which you would have and that which you won't.

Henceforth, You will live by the sweat of your brows
Tilling the soil of your words,
In pain, giving birth to your world with words
Of your own making and devising.
There will be no Word from *The Way It Is*,
And what you apprehend of *The Way It Is*
Will be confusing, paradoxical and enigmatic
Leaving only interpretation and uncertainty.
What is Good and Bad, Story and Event, metaphor and fact
Will forever be confounded for you by words
Whose meaning will be vexatious and slippery.
You will seek your own "good" not knowing the Good.
And your own "good" will be an enigma to you.
Out! Out!"

A condemnation to be sure. But who can blame *The Way It Is*.

And *The Way It Is* placed guardians at the entrance to the garden

To forever confound the ones with Words
From entering the garden again.
And the Wording ones named these guardians
'Ambiguity' and 'Interpretation.'

A consequence to be sure. Of life with *The Way It Is*.

Kenya Medium Roast

Trickle, trickle, click click click.
Schirizz, schirrrzee, schirree.
Pslap splap pslapp.

Guluck glug glug - dit, dit, dit — whoooosh
Sheeo — whooo — ssssssst --- wheeeist

plip plip — schlerrupp, lipsit,
Aaaahhh!

Slicing Mango

my knife
sweeps down

a pliant
arc

slices
away

succulent
fruit

on the
left

it's mango
time

the knife
repeats

on the
right

with a quick
thrust

leaves an
oval slab

called the
"buttoe"

by eaters
of mango

"the bone" of
the fruit

with a quick
chop

removing
the stem

and skin
the bone

has its flat
tear shape

full length
incisions

of the mango
halves

create gold
crescents

shorn of dull
covers

a surgeon's
skill

could not
improve

the beauty
thus revealed

from ugly
fruit

should
paradise have

just one dish
to serve

if asked
what kind

I'd say it's
mango

mango's
what it is

I say it's
mango time

It's mango
mango

Fathoms

She sits lotus fashion
on a white rug
in the narrow room,
backed against Berber cushions.
Before her a small semi-circle
of objects; a candle, incense holder,
photos, journal, rocks,
a small carving of an ancient saint.
Smoke rises from the incense
Curling into the musky odor
of ripe plums.
Out beyond the window,
the ocean at dawn,
its muted motion mirrors
the movement of her breath;
the rug a seafloor littered with
bones of desire.

Nervous

Following a long taxi
From the terminal
We pull onto the main strip
And sit poised at the start
Of the runway used for
Takeoffs and landings
And I imagine a number of planes
Behind us on their final glidepath
Thinking the momentum
Of a Boeing 737 traveling
Over 200 miles per hour
Might make it difficult
To change course soon enough
To avoid us sitting here
Like ducks on a pond
Not able to accelerate
Rapidly in time to leave
A space for their arrival
And what other problems
Do air traffic controllers
Have to deal with
That I know nothing about.

Whatever Happened to God

The idea that God is a literary creation has a lot of merit.

The J writer's YHWH is quite a colorful character.

He, YHWH, is a flamboyant warrior, a jealous and capricious divinity.

Zeus and his cohorts, the Mount Olympus gang, were also a diverse and interesting lot.

But as theologians labored to distill the 'essential' characteristics of God,

He got more vanilla, more emasculated, more abstract and distant;

A ghost of his former self.

Even Jesus' God pales to insignificance when compared to J's YHWH.

A God "dies" when no one really adores or serves him or her.

And, you have to admit, for lack of selves to serve him it doesn't look

Good for the Christian God.

Unless we get some fresh, creative writer, God's days may be numbered.

That is to say, God, as we've known him, may be limited to his

Existence as the current withdrawn, irrelevant, vanilla Santa Claus,

Distant loving Father of the Christ, the abstract first Person of the Trinity.

On the other hand, such a conceptual, inoffensive and convenient God

Could have a long and uneventful life.

The Portrait

I take down the old photo
Taken at Miller's on Reed Street,
The one made before you married dad.
A studio portrait in 1930's style,
Full length, hands clasped in front.
You stand there slim and erect,
In a long sleeveless dress
With only the suggestion of hips
And smart pleats below the waist.
The pattern of the dress is similar
To the draped background.
You appear to emerge from the darkness.
A fox fur reclines over your right shoulder
Its fluid shape reaches to your waist.
Your pose reminds me of movie stars,
Stills I've seen of Clara Bow or Jean Harlow.
Your hair in a popular style of the 30's,
Medium length, framing your face, laying
Black wavelets on your temples just above the eyes.
You're not smiling.
With your head tilted back just slightly,
Dark eyes stare just over my left shoulder,
Off in the distance, somewhere beyond,
Everything seems perfect. There is
Something in the eyes, hesitant and averted.
The fox crouches low over your shoulder
His glass eye gleaming.

Rod Rippel is a retired Chemical Engineer. In the 1960's he left Esso Research & Engineering Co. to join a religious Order of families staffing the Ecumenical Institute of Chicago and traveled widely as a lay trainer in theology and community organization. In 1977 he returned to engineering in industrial waste pretreatment control where he was a manager for two major US cities, first in Detroit and later in San Diego. He lives with his wife in San Diego where he enjoys wine making, senior softball, and writing.



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