

A Way with Words

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All of us are searching for  
our way.

Maybe mine's with words.

Thank you, Father,  
for giving us your Word of Love,  
enfleshed in our world,  
and through your dear Spirit  
living in our hearts.

Thanks too to Kevin, Peg, Pat  
and many others, for help  
along the way.

## Silent Psalm

Slowly, the cool dark  
earth beneath my feet exhales.  
Slugs leave silvered trails.

Tree trunks breathe, listen.  
Mists rise, coiling up like smoke  
swallowed in stillness.

Towering elms, midget  
walnuts, still-green mossy logs,  
tangled ivy, fallen

oak leaves floating red-  
veined in silky-soft sea-grass,  
seagulls' feathers, frisky  
squirrels and that dear orange  
butterfly – All praise our God!

A Refugee's Prayer

(Melody: Finlandia)

Most loving God, we turn to you for mercy.  
Our only home is in your loving heart.  
As on we walk through blinding, ice-bound  
darkness,  
our only food, in others' hands and yours.  
Have mercy, Lord, on us your weary  
children,  
for you are Mercy, father-mother God.

The church bells call, but not to us, the  
Stranger.  
The signs say NO, the fences keep us out.  
So, on we walk through biting winds  
and insults,  
our children's feet encrusted, bleeding,  
numb.  
We trust your love will open hearts and  
fences,  
for you are Mercy, father-mother God.

We thank you, Lord, for those whose bread  
has fed us,  
for those whose smiles have welcomed in  
your name.  
We ask a blessing, Father, on their families.  
May they be blessed, forever, by their own.  
For we are all the children of your mercy.  
You gave us life, O father-mother God.

Come, Holy Spirit

Intrepid Spirit,  
stand me up when I'd much rather  
crawl quietly away.

Tranquil Spirit, shut  
me up when I'm starting to whine  
about my aches 'n' pains.

Mellow Spirit, loosen  
my coils when they're wound too tight,  
ready to explode.

Smiling Spirit, help  
me to lighten up when I'm  
hung over with worries.

Seeing Spirit, send me  
healing tears for the world's pain,  
dry them with your wisdom.

Prodigal Spirit,  
pry open my fists, carefully  
closed against your gifts.

Fiery Spirit,  
melt my frozen, stingy heart.  
Thaw my ice-filled veins.

O Saving Spirit,  
gallop in to rescue me,  
my real, true hero.

## The Jewel

At the edge of a galaxy  
called the Milky Way,  
is a minuscule solar system.

Within what seems its vastness  
a small sphere rotates, revolves –  
formed from rock and metal,  
adorned with life,  
bathed with water,  
protected with a soft cocoon of air –  
our home, our Earth.

## Exchange

Out goes the dusty  
bittersweet. It's seen us through  
winter cold, warmed our

hearts a bit. The vase  
is almost empty. Shake out  
a few crusty petals.  
Ready now for tall pussy-  
willows – soft, smiling, hope-filled.

## Chapel by the Bay

In tabernacled  
silence our risen Christ waits,  
welcoming all.

Beyond rain-splashed windows  
white gulls ride gale-force currents,  
wide wings tilted  
against morning blue. Three small  
ducklets swim safe beside mama.

Gray-paunched, chubby clouds  
linger low, huffing at wispy-  
green budding branches.

The bay is awash  
with silver-speckled waves,  
dancing, sparkling.  
Closer and closer they come,  
yet never quite arrive.

## Eastern Sky

Rain still clings to windows,  
but clouds smile, stretch, part – in a  
wide, blue, morning yawn.

## Low Tide

No wind. No real waves,  
but low liquid ledges move  
slowly towards rocky  
sand, lapping, swishing, swirling –  
disappear at water's edge.

## At Peace

Freeze-warning tonight.  
Will the daffodils survive?  
hyacinths? tulips?

They sleep content, knowing  
(in their own way) the Master  
Gardener holds them

all close. Wiser than  
we, they waste no energy  
on fruitless worrying,

for they trust that if  
bitten by killing frost,  
other lovelies will

take their place – floppy  
lilacs, lilies, narcissus. And  
they will rest in peace.

## Over the Lawn

Tiny lanterns light the night  
in slow circles, up down, here there,  
within reach, yet flickering away.

Curling arcs weave in out, on off.  
Airy travelers praise, pause,  
dance, stretch, rest, glow, shine.

## Appointments

I brave black ice and speckled snow  
for the routine checkup:  
Chin here. Look at my ear. Head still.  
Don't blink. You can relax now.

More of the same and different.  
An hour later, the usual results.  
Jenny, give Sister and appointment  
for three months. Field vision test.

May first at eleven OK? Yes, fine.  
Thank you. Turning three pages,  
I write it in my calendar. Any problems,  
give us a call. Be careful out there.

Thanks, I will. Take care and God bless.  
You too. May first – a lovely date.  
My lips hum the “m.” Tongue behind  
teeth shapes a long “a.” Ma-a-ay.

May first – mellifluous, hope-filled.  
May first – trippingly on the tongue,  
said the Bard, and on the toes, I add.  
May first – smooth, peaceful.

May first – I zip up my bulky jacket.  
Pull up the hood. May first – put on  
my wooly mittens. May first – watch that  
curb. May first. May first...

## Our Only All

Dear Spirit of Love,  
You fill the space between the  
spaces, throughout earth,

sea, sky, within us,  
around, beneath, beside,  
above, and most of all

inside my longing,  
thirsting heart. You are our All,  
now and forever!

Filled are we with love –  
yours, with wisdom, courage, joy,  
child-like trust in our

father-mother God,  
our brother-friend and savior –  
no space left for fear.

## Voting Day

From signing in to  
scanning our ballots, we are  
part of a rainbow –

frizzy black braids, ruddy  
redheads, gray coiffed waves, soft  
dark headscarves, snowy

seniors, olive-skinned  
mamas – all choosing our new  
national leaders,

many unaware  
that our small penciled ovals  
would leave such deep, raw,

oozing claw-marks on  
each other's psyches – which time  
alone will not heal.

Mid-March

Waves whip past the pier, splat  
against the sea-wall.

Winter coat zipped up, mittens  
hardly help – next time, two pairs.

Snow forecast for later today –  
one to three possible.

I find the pussy willow bush  
just feet away, snip  
off thin branches, hurry inside.

Happy  
spring!

## Raking in May

Buried under autumn's  
dry-browned leaves – mostly oak,  
it somehow blossomed,  
waiting for resurrection.  
At last I raked them away –

a half-year's weight – heavy, wet.  
There it lay, limp, forlorn but  
still alive, roots long  
gone, ghostly pale and puny –  
a shivering hyacinth.

## In the Oratory

It's hard to explain, or maybe not.

A brief moment of prayer.

Marguerite's heart -- the precious ashes  
rescued from the fire,  
preserved in the small glass case.

I open my eyes to the fullness  
of the deep red rose in the bouquet,  
like myself, nearing the end of its  
earthly life,  
holding its petals wide open with care.

I look again at its center -- a tiny face,  
a quiet smile.

Her eyes look deep into my own.

I hope, I pray that she likes what  
she sees, that she sees love.

## Summer Cycles

Nestled in the giant  
twisting, snaking roots that hug  
each other and Mother  
Earth, a thriving guest looks up,  
waves, smiles – an orange petunia!

Weeks pass. Leaves leave. No  
flowers. Spindly stems droop,  
then perk, wear soft, green  
bonnets – but not for long. Rusty,  
tired claw lies waiting for first frost.

I-80 West

Bright sun, billowing cloud-shapes.

To our left low, green mountains:  
the Poconos in early-August splendor.

Uphill grade. The engine grunts.

The child behind me goes back to

his vocal forays. Scales. Squeals.

I go back to my book. "Settle down,"  
says his mother gently. He tries.

We pass camp-bound families, forty-ton  
trucks – driver's dark hands relaxed.

What a glorious time to be alive, even  
tough the funeral looms ahead.

## The Swan

On land I lumber  
along – feet flopping, awkward.  
But back in water,  
at peace, I glide, float. Rilke's  
“regal composure” – that's me.

## Excused

Squiggly-necked swan, where  
is your royal dignity?  
Oh, you're itchy? OK.

## Matinee

November-blue sky –  
perfect backdrop for tawny-gold  
elms. Bravo! Bravo!  
As an encore, your flaming  
maple smiles, nods, takes her bow.

Gulls cheer, ducks applaud,  
waves lap, swans glide by – stately,  
elegant as always.  
Canada geese plop and preen  
their plumage, waddle, or graze.

But your squirrels – tails  
twitching, leap from limb to branch.  
Show-offs, spoiled children.  
Can't sit still for two minutes.  
Higher tastes? Only for climbing.

Wait. Are they too part  
of your performance? Perhaps.  
Their high-wire act is  
quite stunning – never miss a  
beat, stumble of trip. Good job!

## New Year's Morning

Sad to see them lying there like that  
in public, stretched out face down.  
I reach in and stand them up, still wobbly  
amid all that holly.

Shepherds? Wise men? One of each?  
With chipped paint and no hands  
it's hard to tell.  
Was it the wind, or some mean joke?

Strange. The others are okay, though  
not really. No hands on most. Even  
Joseph is missing some fingers.  
Fine from a distance and in the dark –  
like the rest of us.  
Still, strange.

Finally, for my four Sibs...

Those We Love and Lose

... are no longer where  
they used to be. Now they are  
wherever we are.

- St. John Chrysostom (349-407 A.D.)

To Ed, 11-4-15

Each night, you'd tell us a new story in the  
dark, then leave us hanging – despite our  
pleas, until our young eyelids closed.  
Your deft fingers taught your grandsons  
how to bait a hook, to cast and reel in,  
and how to hold the handle-bars just so,  
turned chunks of oak or cherry into shining  
tables or treasured chests for loved ones.

Your voice and memory entertained with  
every verse of every song requested.  
You've passed your wisdom on to thousands  
in workshops, courses, all across the globe.  
Your dearest ones were waiting for you –  
("I don't know which one I loved more")  
and dad ("... the best friend I ever had").  
Rest in peace, big hero, relax – you're Home.

To Chris, 4-12-16

Who shall find a valiant woman?

We did, and valiant you still are.

Our dad called his little tow-head

Wilhelmina – “Willa” for short.

Your eyes saw beauty everywhere;

your fingers created it – with needles

and yarn (even in darkened theaters) –

no dropped stitches, snags or snafus.

With spices and sweets, and solid fare,

your table glowed. No one was ever

turned away; no one ever left hungry.

Flowers everywhere – embroidered on

cushions, arranged on shelves. Surely

heaven is more festive, more elegant,

more distingué since you arrived.

And yet you're here with us still –

smiling, lovely as ever – loving us all.

To Mickie, 8-5-16

Do not go gentle, said Dylan, into that  
good night, but by God's good grace,  
you did, because you knew – knew! –  
that the next moment would be glorious,  
bright, wide-open day. Your soft murmur,  
"I'm so happy..." hung in calm August air,  
as you left behind your many loves – your  
six, your many grands and great-grands,

good friends, good reads, your Beloved Lake,  
chocolate, peaches from Beacon, corn from  
the stand, flawless grammar, Monet's gardens  
and your own, kids on the dock – or anywhere.  
You knew you'd be in God's arms, welcomed  
by all you'd loved and lost, but most of all,  
best of all, first and last, forever and always,  
by your ever-dear, one-and-only Bill.

To Frannie, 9-12-74

Memories... Surgery, rehab – fifteen months,  
then off you trudge to fifth grade, doing  
homework to Tommy Dorsey's tunes and Ma  
Perkin's woes, easily finishing first in every  
class. After meals you scrub the yucky pans,  
leaving nicer jobs for us. Each afternoon you  
"practice" – fine enough to charge admission.  
Lively scales, artful arpeggios echo from  
the hall. New songs on the radio? You play  
them like a pro, chords and all, in any key.

Years pass. On birthdays you send a grateful  
update on five little lives and all your doctor  
does for each. Fun-jobs – choral accompanist,  
fancy catering – keep you sane, your ever-  
faithful Ed your strength and joy. Even as you  
fade that last summer, you keep us smiling  
through our tears – and your own. You've lost  
your sight but not your way to God. Thank  
you, Fran, for all you were – and are, for each  
of us – our dear, dear sister, mother, friend.

## Haiku

is a three-line Japanese poetry form,  
usually consisting in English of  
five syllables, then seven, then five.

They deliver maximum effect  
with minimum description,  
or they can continue,  
telling their story in new verses.

Tanka also originated in Japan.

It begins as a haiku,  
adding on two more lines  
of seven syllables each.

Both can be a way to pray, to see  
the world around us more clearly,  
and can be a joy to read and to write.

In this booklet they are found on pages  
1, 4-5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21,  
22-23, 25.