

See Below

**Poetry by Frank Blau
1980-2007**

Annotated by Frank Blau

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Introduction

I first described myself as a poet at around the age of 15. I wrote songs, mostly emulating pop singers and Bob Dylan. Eventually I was exposed to a broader range of poetic voices and began creating a voice for myself.

At 43, I decided it was time to capture what that young man thought, learned and wrote about in the years between that tender assertion and the present.

I have always been a fan of annotations. Whether it was my first Norton Anthology, or Weisenberg's Guide To Gravity's Rainbow, there is an attraction to learning about the context of a literary work that has always appealed to me.

I am taking this time to recover, reflect and document some of the what's and why's of my poems through the years. In part, to have a record of things that will someday slip away, but also to honor and give the proper respect to a process that is such an important and meaningful part of my life.

I am organizing this work first rather randomly, since many of the dates (nay, epochs) of creation are missing or only vaguely recalled. I suppose that is another intention revealed here: to provide my own contextual timeline of the stories and timeline they reveal.

Where I had actual dates, I include it in the body of the poem, otherwise refer to the footnotes for more temporal context.

Frank Blau
Sammamish, WA

July 2007
November 2008

to curse up a storm¹

the leaves are shuffling like blind
crabs across the road, the lake
is a Monet grey this afternoon.
The maple trees, skeleton witches, are beckoning
with their winter-thin fingers;
It is cold enough for prayer.

The air, that extant wraith,
Is full of whispers today –
Is that the wind and her passing song,
or destiny's conjectures, slipping
down to earth?

12/7/93

¹ I was looking for something more lyrical than “conjur” and re-purposed “curse”. This is a one of several winter solstice poems from 1993. This particular one was inspired by the Waldorf belief that on the night of the solstice, the stars whisper to seeds in the ground their destiny.

Desert Pet²

“Tis we, who lost in stormy visions, keep
With phantoms an unprofitable strife.”

-Shelley³

A knight in the fog is
a Desert Pet poem full
of a wind-chill fear;
A crack that would
break your mother's back:

I woke up and feared
the nightmare was here-
full of screaming relatives
and a madness that lingers
past waking

I should know by now
I'll never write this poem,

While my days, less
than dry ink, are telling an old
old story.

² This image came from a dream series in the mid-1980's. I feel like it conveyed a romantic notion of the loner archetype, an image that carried over from the world of nightmares to the waking world of dealing with my childhood fears. I was still drinking at this time, and many of my dreams had this quality of a shallow boundary between reality and the subconscious.

³ **Percy Bysshe Shelley** (1792 – 1822; was one of the major English Romantic poets. I was heavily influenced by the lives and images of these poets.

War is Not Healthy⁴

“Do not devour me in revenge.”

-Yevtushenko⁵

Your name is tattooed on my wrist – in flesh tones
just under the skin, the mark of
conception, courage and blood,
where tiny balls of pain bloomed like sweat.
And though we have melted the jewelry,
decided who owns what, sold the books and signed the checks,
Your name remains, my wife, my work,
and will, until we are not.

These are the invisible vouchers of loss,
the scattered spores of anger,
mile-marks of a failed marriage.
The feeling that we will never Be, yet always be.

5/30/95⁶

⁴ From the 1970's poster that decorated the wall of my childhood home: “War is not healthy for children and other living things”.

⁵ Russian poet Yevgeny Aleksandrovich Yevtushenko, from the poem (). He is also one of my mother's favorite poets.

⁶ Another post-divorce poem. A plea for civility in the face of acrimony.

Winter Solstice⁷

Thumbs front, I push through these weeks apart
as the water drops race across the window.
Small piles of last week's snow are at the end
of the neighbor's driveway where the trees
huddle together, whispering at prayer.

It is the one day of a long year where your cries
for darkness, slumber and anesthesia are heard;⁸

The little diamond stars will soon return.

12/21/93

⁷ The second of two winter solstice poems from 1993. Ann and I had separated at this time and I was working on the final divorce paperwork, but we still had to return to our home in New Fairfield to verbalize the choice to each other and the children.

⁸ See "To Curse up a Storm" for the mythology reference.

Untitled⁹

The mentors of my self-destruction are gone today
and I am left to wonder what I learned

that quality of voice, needing, always needing
more money for the phone and time for the same
stories and remarkable advice –
Just his body giving up?¹⁰

I babysat the rat and got a 48-star flag and an old .38 from
my first honest-to-god irish drunk movie star apartment manager –
Struck on the head at a donut shop?¹¹

a decade's haunting of bad choices brought back on the chorus,
his stricken face and shaking hands, playing

*If I needed you
would you come to me
for to ease my pain –*

Lost the fight with his heart?¹²

I want the old men to stop dying, even
the difficult, and the ragged, the vain and the alcoholic,
the untouchable and the touched,
For their eyes were shining with what I chose not to become,
and they are closed forever.
And their legs, the blind wardens of the path I did not take,
will not walk again.

⁹ Written on the occasion of the convergence of deaths of three men that influenced me: Skip Weshner, Jack Nance and Townes Van Zant. This probably puts this poem in late 1995 or so.

¹⁰ Skip Weshner, LA DJ and family friend. He lived with me off and on in the mid 1980's until I just couldn't support him any more. We were estranged for a few years, but had a reconciliation just prior to his death of congestive heart failure.

¹¹ Jack Nance, star of David Lynch films like "Eraserhead" and "Twin Peaks". He was the manager of the apartment building where I lived on Barrington Ave. in Mar Vista, CA in the early 1980's. He and I had some memorable drunken experiences together during that time. He died after getting involved in a fight at a donut shop. I hadn't seen him in years, but it still affected me.

¹² Texas folksinger Townes Van Zant, an amazing musician and songwriter. I had seen him solo as well as a warm up for The Cowboy Junkies. One of his last concert's was one of my first dates with Linda in Seattle. She even got his autograph and it still hangs under his picture in our hallway.

patti bird's song¹³

the aviary is in mourning, thin black birds
with slick wings and chicken legs, shivering together,
goose bumps exposed in the Midwestern air,
yellow beaks yapping 'bout patti bird"

- well ain't that shame about ole' fred
- that poor thing hasn't eaten in days
- gonna waste away to nothing

but she was writing something in blue ink
over there in the corner she keeps,
biting on her pen – slipping on and off those thick glasses

*we were supposed to be about the fucking future
not some sort of truncated, topped off timber harvest
not some lizard's tail pulled off at the moment of escape
not some sort of 'well, that's all folks!'
not some sort of three and out
this was supposed to be a four act play*

paper cups, the inside pages of the Daily News, and the
wax paper wrap of fast food servings
make their wind-blown way over to her desk, little tornadoes
with reverent heads, bearing their sympathy cards –
these are the featherings of a wild bird's nest

but patti bird is homeless, black, naked, with impossibly thin legs
pacing on the wind, yellow eyes squeezing out one new tear for every
one the air steals, leaving that sandy dry place on her cheek, remembering

*isn't that just like playing on the beach
until you collapse and let the sun bake salt onto
your sandword skin thinking, there is no fresh water here
you weren't supposed to drown
you weren't supposed to be taken in the tide
you were supposed to ride back laughing at the tossing waves*

that's just about a million miles from this cyclone fence, cinder carpet

¹³ Patti Smith, American poet, singer, songwriter and activist. This poem was written when her husband Fred "Sonic" Smith, co-founder of Detroit proto-punk band The MC5, died suddenly of a brain embolism. Patti had been in "retirement" for many years, and it wasn't until after Fred's death that she started releasing new work as a way of processing her grief. I was fortunate enough to see her first spoken word performance in 15 years in Central Park.

and the sad sound of scratching beaks, scraping claws and the cries
of a loud and lonesome bird.¹⁴

11/8/94

¹⁴ I always had the image of Patti as a raven, wild dark hair, thin legs and a loud voice telling us important things. She was, and remains a musical and poetic inspiration to me. I sent a copy of this poem to her fan club address and months later I received a hand written note from her mother thanking me for writing, and promising to forward it on to Patti. I like to think this is on a refrigerator somewhere.

there was one¹⁵

there was one
dream last night
where the world ended.
as thousands went
dancing into death
you stood there
frowning and
shuffling your feet
to “Born to Run”¹⁶

8/21/84

¹⁵ Written about a real dream, about a girl that I worked with at Henry Radio in Los Angeles. I don't even remember her name, but I remember that she was a libertarian and didn't smile a lot. Oh and she owned a gun. I don't recall any serious interactions or conversations, but she showed up in this dream and I was compelled to document the image.

¹⁶ The Bruce Springsteen song, of course.

Ritual: The Dream of a Younger Man¹⁷

What then? As we strip away
our stained clothing, learning
to bake in the dusty sunlight;

What then? As our skin,
pale for years, turns red with
time and the next hour's fear;

What then? The dancing starts
with hungry beats, the rise and fall
of your shining breasts;

For every step we take, there is
dust, pain, progress and pleasure –
The time for play is ended.

¹⁷ In the mid-1980's I was introduced to the world of Performance Art in Los Angeles. I was taking a creativity and performance workshop with Barbara T. Smith, and she introduced me to Chico MacMurtrie, an amazing and powerful artist. Chico's work was animatronic robotic creatures, clad in latex drippings and animal hair. For a while, I helped Chico with the electronics and programming of his shows. This poem was written after a show at a strange farm north of Los Angeles called Zorthian's Ranch. There were all sorts of odd people and installations going on. A young woman latched on to me and I could tell she was torn between the fear or really letting go in a performance and the freedom that came with experiencing that process in all its grit and exposure. I continued to do performance projects, and even co-wrote (with my good friend Stefanie Naifeh) produced and acted in a play, "40 Winks" that was presented as part of the Los Angeles Fringe Festival. There is highly embarrassing video of this somewhere.

Casablanca¹⁸

All the walls we've broken
will be hiding in our eyes
as the silver crystals in your hair
are just whispering goodbye.

¹⁸ Written for my dear friend Kathy (O'Brien) Hall. We were best friends in high school in Yorktown Heights, New York (1978-80). After I moved to Los Angeles she came to visit me for 2 weeks in 1984 while she was on leave from the Army. I was really sad to see her leave, but her grace, warmth and healthy energy was an inspiration for me to make some positive changes in my relationships and life. We remain good email friends to this day. Coincidentally or not her full maiden name is Katherine Marie O'Brien, and my daughter is Caitlin Marie Blau.

Rachel¹⁹

Real witches just watch
and let the poison seep
behind your eyes;
a shake of her head,
that look, frozen on her face.

2/27/85

¹⁹ Another anima poem. Rachel was an student in my Manufacturing Engineering class at UCLA Extension. We carpooled occasionally, and I thought she was immeasurably hip. But she always waltzed off into the arms of some rocker guy that would meet the car as we pulled up. But one time she turned around to look at me and this poem was born.

moon-glitter fish²⁰

moon-glitter fish, that's what
it looks like from the pier

and the palos verdes lights
with their rich lights spinning

off the giant swells
lumbering into Hermosa beach

like some great message
from the front page news.

²⁰ A benign imagist poem from the mid-1980's, when Ann and I were living in Hermosa Beach in Southern California.

That Day²¹

Twitching in the morning
I gathered up my dreams
and put them
(change and all)
in the Devil's purse,
Bills, bills, bills,
like autumn,
they lose their color on the floor.

²¹ A poem written circa 1983, following a night of hallucinogenics.

The Story of my Life²²

Someone else wrote
“Deacon Blues”²³

²² Sometime in 1982-83. My friend Rueben argues that this is the best poem I have ever written.

²³ The Steely Dan (Becker/Fagen) song:

This is the day of the expanding man
That shape is my shade
There where I used to stand
It seems like only yesterday I gazed through the glass
At ramblers, wild gamblers, that's all in the past

You call me a fool, You say it's a crazy scheme
This one's for real, I already bought the dream
So useless to ask me why
Throw a kiss and say goodbye
I'll make it this time, I'm ready to cross that fine line

I'll learn to work the saxophone
I'll play just what I feel
Drink scotch whisky all night long
And die behind the wheel
They got a name for the winners in the world
I want a name when I lose
They call Alabama the crimson tide
Call me deacon blues

My back to the wall
A victim of laughing chance
This is for me the essence of true romance
Sharing the things we know and love
With those of my kind
Libations, Sensations, that stagger the mind

I crawl like a viper through these suburban streets
Make love to these women, languid and bittersweet
I'll rise when the sun goes down
Cover every game in town
A world of my own
I'll make it my home sweet home

This is the night of the expanding man
I take one last drag as I approach the stand
I cried when I wrote this song
Sue me if I play too long
This brother is free
I'll be what I want to be

Departures²⁴

In my hands are
shattered sobbing gems
wilting like a moaning dawn
on silent singing hinges.

²⁴ 1984? No idea what I was talking about here, but the images are recurrent ones.

2:00 AM²⁵

There's a little old man
hiding in my hands
- I really thought I knew
about you
- No, there is no time to talk.
I too want to be pure
But this old man (the
one in my hands)
is dirty dirty dirty.

Once, there was a chain
around your neck (old man,
I called you Dog)
Once, I played with you
(in my hands)
But now, my time is a chorus
of false starts and
one timers, barking

and tonight, your claws
will click out in the hall.

²⁵ Presumably, when I wrote this, sometime in the early 1980's. This is a difficult poem. I was heavily influenced by Jim Carroll at this time, so there is some of his stylistic spin on this one. The images are a combination of remnants from drug experiences and dealing with father issues.

not your flower²⁶

I sat in the corner
scolded like a child, afraid.
Winter's hands around my waist
saying, the time has come –

even now, the last leaves are
spinning to earth,
those that remain can be
counted on one hand

soon the frozen covers will
tuck themselves around my chin
calling, hush little baby
don't you cry, hush little baby
don't you cry.

²⁶ Written around 1995-96. More winter blues.

Untitled²⁷

I am not your infinite circle
your sea, the inside card,
crossing you, signifying the space
you dwell in.

I am the watercolor man,
covering your canvas
in springlight

while the rains,
my lover, are washing
me away.

²⁷ Written around 1996. In love with a married woman.

medallion²⁸

“I lost my St. Christopher,
Now that I’ve kissed her”
-Tom Waits²⁹

falls down like change –
silly nickel symbols
around my feet

medals given
in trust can lose their soul,
to rust and time,

or loss of faith,
that law forbids but lips
and hearts desire.

²⁸ Summer 1996. About making choices and challenges to fate. The gift of a St. Christopher medal, and what can go wrong.

²⁹ From the song “Tom Traubert’s Blues”

the wait³⁰

all winter I sat at your feet
dumb and quiet as ice,
locked between the frozen banks.

but summer came, and I washed
over you like tropical waves;
huge mountains of danger –

through the fear and past
the hours of pleasure, into
the future's unknown season

tangled in your smooth legs,
where my shadow remains,
and will until we are not.

³⁰ Summer 1996.

For Jim Carroll³¹

the drone echoes
Broken replies between
Dark shadowed ancient columns;
The animal for me is the pigeon,
 (he does not fly)
Scattering easy at foot's command.
 (and I am not intimidated)
Yes we circle the mezzanine –
Watching futile calisthenics.
Catch my laser ray!
Is it not a whisper from Andromeda?

³¹ 1980. Written in Rome, as a response to a poem (which I cannot remember) by American poet and rock singer Jim Carroll. I was heavily influenced by him for years, second only to Anne Sexton in my attributions. Years later, I met him backstage at a reading in LA and was sorely disappointed by his obvious drug use and its impact on his personality.

Untitled: Rome 1980³²

There is a frozen hell
Between these brown smogged bricks.
Medusa my child? She is blind.
Rotation owl wise in darkness
Now we cannot go, nor glow
Effervescent glasses ring crystalline as
the church drones on for me in silence;
the quiet crucifixions continue.
These are smooth walls here
without toeholds or rope to grab,
no hand over hand, just head over heels,
until our necks are rigid in the sand.

To turn again to the trees is to hear
the innocent scream silenced
by peeling shagbark covers.
Stalking my own, the stairs loom over
where fear has conquered marble tonight.
So I remain on the straight and narrow.
Pasted mirrors over black eyes
putter past on lively bike's roar.³³
Now there is no one to hold my hand
To cut the towering cake
and giggle the frosting away.
Share the raging dizziness in my head
where we can dance around the columns
Pray together, huddling underground
or surrender to the ashes of the mountain.

The current carries me along in the gutter
tonight and tomorrow, I will fight the lions.
Eddies ripple past, like too many Sydneys,³⁴
they just swirl off into the night.
Turn your gaze upward!
Attempt to hurdle this wretched blockade!
Quintuplet sinews, five finger's nails
tug at the stratified fortress.
But here is not cave limestone.³⁵

³² Heavily influenced by my friend and mentor David Newman. His free verse style opened up my mind to the possibilities in language, even if this one is highly derivative. I liked Rome, but it scared me, and I never felt at home there. This was an attempt to articulate that ambivalence. It is also the longest poem I have ever written.

³³ Italian boys, with their aviator glasses and vespas. I loathed them.

³⁴ From Dickens' Tale of Two Cities, the scene where Sydney ponders his fate as he watches the water swirl below.

Here we can trust a solid grip.
Gloveless, we place our boots into a crack.
My orbic friend winks with new menace
Hold tight! He hisses with the night.
Wistfully recall yesterday, and beg for dreams.

No harness, no chariot,
my carbide has been renewed eternal,
across grey skies at early sunset.

³⁵ Climbing references to my brief foray into spelunking while living in Yorktown.

Hesse³⁶

How can we do this?
What our hands can
pull across a page

Night is a time
without answers

Day is a look
without questions

Given space I'd
damn our hands

This curses my veins
like gin.³⁷

³⁶ Herman Hesse. I was reading a lot of his stuff at the time (1980).

³⁷ The first of many existential gin references. It was my drink of choice. Mainly because if I had some, I rarely had to share it.

Ego³⁸

I never need this god.
Who has picked the grapes
of his heart
knows this truth
at night.

³⁸ Early 1980's existential angst.

Adam³⁹

Draw the sheets around cold limbs;
Nakedness fidgets from below.
Close the window,
I have eaten the fruit –
Last night she left me alone.

³⁹ Mid 1980's. I don't remember why I wrote this or who "she" was. It is interesting that this was around the same time as other, more agnostic poems, all with biblical themes.

Within the Madding Crowd⁴⁰

Eileen might think
this funny but the hills
“aren’t there” tonight⁴¹
The ocean bubbled and fooled
me tonight

no, it didn’t really
by itself it didn’t

but way over Venice
it’s still beating

no, not cleansing
filthing with the sewer
leaking into oceans
slime on my body
among my own pieces

there are no cities beyond this balcony
and the hills “aren’t there” tonight

I lift the bottle
to my lips and look
across the black and brown

My god, my Mother, it is
to far to Hollywood
too hard to Greenwich Village

I have no art.
I see.

⁴⁰ A reference to Thomas Hardy’s *Far From the Madding Crowd* that I was reading for a class at Santa Monica College. This poem was written around 1982 when I was living in Mar Vista. It was dedicated to “My Honky” which is a nickname for my mom. You could usually see all the way to the Hollywood Hills from our balcony.

⁴¹ My sister and Eileen and I used to have a joke about things being “not there” when you were stoned. That’s about all I remember about that private joke.

Gin Guppies⁴²

my little gin guppies,
silver dreamstuff,
swim back into my brain –
the many drinking skulls
I hide behind.
Like sad wisdom,
they leave their strength
on the counter,
and cry cry cry.

⁴² An image of small insignificant fish, disposable. This was written around 1982.

Clay Poem⁴³

“Shape the clay into a vessel
It is the space within that makes it useful.”
-Lao Tsu⁴⁴

I have learned of clay and bottles
In all my years behind a desk
but it was Woman that proved:

I have learned nothing.

-In the fires of love she put me⁴⁵
And in the morning
She left without reason

It was my mother
who taught me to cry.

⁴³ Circa 1982

⁴⁴ The father of Taoism, from the “Tao Te Ching”

⁴⁵ I got this from the translation of a line from Ezra Pound’s Canto II. Interestingly, the translation of “Nel fuoco d’amore mi mise” is also attributed to St. Francis as “In the fires of love he has me”.

The Relationship Between Anxiety Attacks and the Famous Budweiser Lager Beer⁴⁶

these days the
one-on-one wolves
drop their cans on the floor
as my life echoes
through the canyons

⁴⁶ 6/4/85 Mar Vista CA. Points for a long title that says more than the poem.

Kat⁴⁷

You cascade over my senses
Like cool peppermint tea,
with a sweet
but chilling
aftertaste.

Always
Always
Always
A sense to never
Forget
Forget
Forget
Forever.

⁴⁷ Kathy O'Brien (Hall). See "Casablanca". This was written in 1979, a sophomore in high school in Yorktown Heights, NY. I was learning about the visual presentation of poems and perhaps overdoing it.

Valentines Day⁴⁸

“Better by far you should forget and smile
than that you should remember and be sad.”

-Christina Rossetti⁴⁹

All strength is gone
and a wet cat sits in the corner
without music
just missing, again.

⁴⁸ 2/25/85 For Robin (Kirchoff). Robin and I went out and were engaged from about 1983-1985. It was a very difficult breakup which accelerated my substance abuse (and poetic output) considerably.

⁴⁹ English pre-Raphaelite female poet.

Finding a Box of Old Poems⁵⁰

I'm not the imagist I used to be;
So full of seasons and sadness

And this is the real world baby
with all its sweat and monday mornings—

there are bumps on the buns of the planet!

⁵⁰ 2/10/86. I had been sober for 3 months and was connecting with some older work and feeling like things were never going to be the same, creatively.

precious⁵¹

Into this fine sense of rational my rational
days comes this wind around the poles that

line my way home.

I'm off my feet this time and so far out of
my head this time that this time might be

the real last time.

⁵¹ 6/30/86, Hermosa Beach CA. Still getting used to being sober and still being able to create. It sounds suicidal, but it really wasn't intended that way.

Untitled Love Poem⁵²

I've used up the current stock of
all the images called love in
poem, letter and song; yet
the night still calls "I love you Ani"
with every whistle of the wind,

this old Linda Ronstadt record
scratching out "I love you",
and this grey screen taunting me:
There are no words for this kind of
Love through the looking glass,
no magic than can hold the spell

of a love that knows no limits
no borders, no fear, simply
no words to hold the spell of
this love.

⁵² Circa 1986.

Untitled⁵³

That sweet suburban smell of
a summer wet lawn, and all
the trying we did today, spell success

for that smile on your face can't
be measured by the water on the street,
and that orange sky swimming

into the California night just sets down
saying: this is the now that you
have been waiting for.

⁵³ Circa 1986. Ani and I had been having a lot of struggles with the idea of will as it related to relationship and sobriety. This seems to indicate a positive outcome at at least one juncture.

Smashing a Glass Box⁵⁴

setting up this tension that has
something to do with this big
WHAT DO YOU DO? question that
I find myself asking people these
days. And its not like I have any
great idea where a piece like this
would even go but I guess that the
point is still WHAT DO YOU DO? not
out of any great moral or political

statement, but more of a spiritual
thing for me that I think should be
heard. You see, it is what I do.

⁵⁴ 4/13/86. I was getting more involved in the Los Angeles performance art scene, and was exploring ways of expressing simpler ideas, both poetically and visually. I'm not sure where I was going with this poem, whether or not it was something to be performed or not.

Mother Poem⁵⁵

“ ‘Cause even if we make it
I'll be too far out to take it
You'll have to try and shake it from my head
Oh I wish I was your mother...”

-Ian Hunter⁵⁶

My creative light shimmered about the house last night. I felt like my mother
and all the years she kept her secrets in the keys of her blue typewriter

I was her own bad marriage, with diapers that needed changing, spitting out
school money and keeping one eye on the stove clock's sweeping seconds

Time was this waiting game where promised light was put off to another day;
where love was hiding under the carpet of her craft

Fifteen years later I put my 300 dots-per-inch pen to paper. My mother's
freedom is beneath my hands tonight. I taste her suffering.

⁵⁵ Circa 1988. My mother wrote some great poetry when she was younger. I don't know if she still does, but I was empathetic with her struggle to be a parent and remain creative.

⁵⁶ Ex-Mott The Hoople guitarist and singer.

1969, Live⁵⁷

There has got to be more to life
than sitting along in your bed
with your smelly feet
very very drunk
listening to the Velvet Underground.

⁵⁷ Title of a moody Velvet Underground album. I wrote this circa 1985, obviously prior to getting sober. I do still listen to the Velvet Underground, though I think I change my socks more frequently now.

Your Rain Poem⁵⁸

not but the night between us
started a poem about fear
and with every little river
on my window and crackling
drop on the cement
I gave up my heart
reluctantly, wanting so much
to put it all in your hands

not but the night between us
and all the soggy songs he sings.

⁵⁸ I wrote this for Susie, who I was dating after breaking up with Robin, sometime around 1984-85. Susie and I had legendary extended breakups.

Untitled⁵⁹

What it is all about is
this: “take
this night poem, turn it
on your finger
and put it in your
pocket...” and full
of this moon-drenched
dream, put
this dance to heart, until
the footsteps
fade away.

⁵⁹ No idea when or why I wrote this... or why I felt the need to quote myself. Interestingly, the poem has another poorly metered stanza crossed out underneath it that reads:

That’s a long long time in
a house like this.

All the Returns⁶⁰

“I give you back your heart,
I give you permission-“
-Anne Sexton⁶¹

I've drank enough scotch today
Been through Ricky Skaggs,⁶²
“Waiting for the Sun to Shine”
Been through this perfect day
of sunshine and blue

letting you go a little more
each time that chorus comes around.

⁶⁰ I believe this poem was written for Susie, but its unique significance comes more from an affected eclecticism of source material: the title is from the Rickie Lee Jones song “The Returns”:

But after all
There are such things
And these are the things
Who'll turn your memories back into dreams again
Oh, it's all flying and waving
For you to keep trying
You're so close.
So close.
All the returns
One of these days,
One of these days,
One of these days,
One of these days.

⁶¹ American poet (1928-1974). I was introduced to Anne Sexton by my 10th grade English teacher, Angela Leone. Anne's brutally honest confessional poetry is one of the biggest influences on my poetic voice. Her attention to images, craft and emotional content is without parallel. Her name, presence and image reoccurs many times in my poetry and painting. This epigraph is from the poem “For my Lover, Returning to His Wife”.

⁶² Bluegrass musician. I had a phase of listening to him, most likely at the urging of my sister Teri. “Waiting for the Sun to Shine” is a particularly bleak song:

I've been standing underneath this dark old cloud
Waiting for the sun to shine
Waiting for the sun to shine
In my heart again
I've been throwing a lot of good love away
Waiting for the sun to shine
Waiting for the sun to shine in my heart again

Untitled⁶³

The absurdity of an American
flag on the beach and all
this talk of war just breaks
my heart as if to say: don't
they know how good love
feels?

Hold me until the bombs start
falling like little white
stars from a blue sky.

⁶³ 4/14/86, Hermosa Beach. I believe this was about the news of a new skirmish with Libya, and my new relationship with Ani.

And Many More⁶⁴

I wish I could take
this birthday cake
and squash it cold
against the wall

the years have been good
save the broken hearts
so easy to bounce
against your dreams

live it good,
little wolf, for
your days are numbered
three, two, one,

one small step for man.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ 7/17/85. Mar Vista, CA. This was my last birthday before I got sober.

⁶⁵ I had dreams of being an astronaut.

bar poem⁶⁶

give me a poem with a tear
a phrase wrapped in pain
just one more line of hurt

and this whole damn thing
should be sealed up tight

leaving me with Brenda Lee
The Motels, and a better outlook
of course.

But I could never write
a poem like that.

⁶⁶ 10/28/85, Mar Vista CA. There was a local bar with Brenda Lee and The Motels (and Elvis Costello) on it.

Day One⁶⁷

“I hibernated under the covers
last night, not sleeping until dawn
came up like twilight and the oak leaves
whispered like money.
The hemlocks are the only
Young thing left. You are gone.”
-Anne Sexton

No matter pain,
for yesterday you
slipped away as I
poisoned, fell asleep
to sunrise and those whispers,
oh those whispers;
I should have drank
that silky young thing –
The hemlocks my dear,
the hemlocks.

(Is this a better death,
naked over L.A.?
Some things
I'll always remember
Too precious for a sigh,
you are gone.)

⁶⁷ 12/15/84, Mar Vista, CA. Written for my dear friend and unrequited crush Georgia. We met at a bus stop outside Santa Monica College where I described her as “looking like Jacqueline Bissett and dressed like Joey Ramone”. She was a photographer and writer of confessional poetry. We bonded over music, Anne Sexton, self-destruction and the haunting addictions of our lives. We remained friends for many years, even as our lives went from out-of-control LA punks to primarily respectable suburbanites. I wrote many poems about her through the years, as she would pass through my life. The titles “Day One”, “Day Two and “Day Three” were inspired by the set of Anne Sexton poems titled “18 Days Without You”.

Day Two⁶⁸

I have a cure for insomnia,
That wolf of wolves,
Before, I would have
called it you:

The length behind my sighs;

But now,
bright-eyed,
a red-faced pagan
waiting

Yes! I called my cure you.
 “till sunlight returned
 to dazzle his eyes”⁶⁹

For now,
I'll call my cure poison.
For now, you are gone.

⁶⁸ 12/17/84 – Mar Vista CA. For Georgia.

⁶⁹ I think I took this line from a poem from my sister Teri.

Day Three⁷⁰

“We both know what memories can bring
They bring diamonds and rust.”

-Joan Baez⁷¹

You show your face again
poking out of hiding places in your head
she said “I’ve seen this light before,
look! The light is creeping across the floor”
... and stayed until noon.

⁷⁰ 12/17/84, Mar Vista, CA. Written for Georgia.

⁷¹ From her brilliant, brave song for Bob Dylan, “Diamonds and Rust.

Father's Day⁷²

For three nights in my beautiful bed I
dreamed black dreams of you and all
the stories between us

that today only you know – while
I lie in silent pain, just waiting

for all my dreams to come true.

⁷² 6/14/86, Hermosa Beach, CA. I wrote this poem about my complicated, abusive and amnesiac relationship with my father. This was many years before confronting some of the issues in therapy, but I was sober and living with Ani at the time, hence the dichotomy between beauty and anger.

Just Another Lou Reed Song⁷³

That's you,
much like a song I'd never write
and very much like the weight
that sits on my head, alone
"Oh Lady Day..." it could have
been much better than this,
cold, very sure of nothing.

⁷³ Circa 1985, Mar Vista CA. Still in my Lou Reed/Velvet Underground phase. I can't remember who I wrote this for, but the song "Lady Day" is off of the "Berlin" album.

Kelly's Poem⁷⁴

Assuming I'm given the choice,
I'd trade my gun for you;
For you're safer than bullets,
And much warmer than a .38

⁷⁴ Circa 1985, Mar Vista CA. There were several Kelly's in my life in the 80's so I can't recall which one I wrote this silly poem for, but it is memorable to note that I actually did own a gun at one point in my life. Remarkable, considering how anti-gun I am today.

new silence⁷⁵

new silence brought on
by time work and the
unremitting demands on
the land that once was
my own

time that great obstacle is always
in the door just as I am forcing my way into the room
where art is
not a luxury – filling the
cracks between the tiles of the day.

⁷⁵ Undated poem, most likely 1986-87. Adjusting to a more sober, rational lifestyle.

Off the Wagon⁷⁶

five days is long enough
the wolf of the steppes cries
and his howling
rips my strength to shreds.

⁷⁶ 7/17/85, Mar Vista, CA. A failed attempt at sobriety and some Herman Hesse imagery.

Q is for Quiet⁷⁷

there were no words
as our time together
dripped like honey
through our fingers

long after you're gone
the smoke still lingers
I sit on the couch and wonder
about time
that condemns us all.

⁷⁷ 5/1/85 Mar Vista, CA. For Susie, aka "Susie Q".

Simple⁷⁸

drunk at 9:00 AM
“cryin’ my heart out over you”⁷⁹

life ain’t just
a country western song

sliding out this morning
on the radio

two miles away
I can hear you sleeping

so far from me
perhaps where you belong

so very far from me
just for you.

⁷⁸ 1985 Mar Vista. Another poem for Susie.

⁷⁹ Another Ricky Skaggs song.

Some Kinda Love⁸⁰

“... some kinda love,
The possibilities are endless...”
-Lou Reed

Isn't that just like you, on
the edge of a new forever

and isn't that just like me, in
the night air's wonder wind;

The possibilities are endless.

⁸⁰ 4/2/86 Hermosa Beach CA. For Ani. Title and epigraph from a Lou Reed song.

Untitled⁸¹

obviously it is happening again
I am not a mask
I am not a mask
repeat, I am not a mask
I have lived this dream behind
every night that I have lived
You see, I thought that I had
lost the wolf. that was before.
before, before, before,
this word, it hurts me.
My life, it has gone before me
do not think this life
that strong, for I have lost
a million times
before, before, before,
how I hate that word
before
I am not here
I am far within this poem
so far
I am lost.

Please, my raft, my help
The Lady on the Couch⁸²
You, are fine
and you can help me through
but
please do not try to understand
I am not the pilot here
another's hand
(the animal inside me has the reins)

but you can be the wheel
guide me
help me
I have not lost
but slipped
slipped, slipped
but I have slipped before.

⁸¹ Circa 1983, Mar Vista CA. Most likely written under the influence of hallucinogenics.

⁸² Robin

Rimbaud⁸³

He was a child in Africa's granite
hall. Worms ran springtime through
his waltzing tired blood. And like
a sugar, brought him underground
again.

Down below the heavy bench
where hammers smash.

So slow and low he sank into the
ground.

His mother would not wake him in
the evening; She let the snow pile
on her step
as she shivered
and listened to the long waves
far, far away.

⁸³ 1983 Mar Vista, CA. Arthur Rimbaud, French Symbolist poet. I had been reading Henry Miller's biography of Rimbaud "Time of the Assassins". The romantic notion of a self-destructive 17 year-old poet clearly resonated with me.

To Street⁸⁴

With a cold whistle and a waking cat
morning stirs, perched upon cement poles
as mercury stars extinguish.
You lie content in your asphalt blanket.

Too stable for groaning, you sing
of dawn deliveries and best of
sunrise watching friends. You lie low!
A sable carpet for frozen beggars.

Aortic pulsate with country capillaries,
Prostrate painted trunks
with yet greener limbs,
stretching your stained fingers
into the change pockets of the city.

⁸⁴ Circa 1981, Rome Italy. I wrote this for my creative writing class, based on a required romantic form. I was pleasantly surprised with the results, and it is one of the first poems that I really remembering struggling with getting into a particular structure.

Rain Check⁸⁵

Regrets I can't stay for much more,
For tonight I must work 'cause I'm poor.
But if you'll allow me,
To change the marquee,
These roses I'll leave at your door.

⁸⁵ A woo-woo poem for Susan Scott.

Love Story⁸⁶

Lover,
You confuse me.
Every night
Becomes like rape
And awful tears.,
they fall lover,
they fall.

It is another silence
I do not understand –

Let me tell you a story:
A boy. A book. A bottle.
I have lived this way
for hundreds of years.

My “all supreme”,
My day,
Do not think I
could not understand
Your pain.

⁸⁶ I debated including this one in here. It was written for a girlfriend in college, Cathleen, around 1981-82 that had a real hard time in the early days of our relationship because of abuse in a previous relationship. Ultimately, it ended amidst great fireworks and drama.

Daisy Tuesday⁸⁷

“found a woman
 changed and familiar face
hard night, and parting at morning.”
 -Ezra Pound – Canto V⁸⁸

Melody lit rooms dance as tired faces,
happy stars rain cold upon our new fiesta.
Summertime rang quick, so fine,
but a glimpse of a new heart on an old train.
No, the day is not mine now,
Nor ever was it in my hand.
But snow sits for the sun,
so a poet begs your
little feet to stay.
Touching only in the short spring
what grazed a Roman wilderness
with a flower time or two.

⁸⁷ June 1981, Rome, Italy. Written for Jody Van Der Koort, a woman that I met at a cast party for Hamlet (which I had been in), about 2 weeks before I left Rome after graduating from high school. She was exotic, sassy and beautiful, and I had quite the crush on her for several weeks. We wrote a few letters and then had a disastrous meeting a year or so later in Rome when I was back visiting for Christmas. See the next poem.

⁸⁸ I was heavily influence by Ezra Pound at this time of my life. I was reading his huge biography and I was in awe of his ability to put words together in such a free and powerful way.

Untitled⁸⁹

This pen – slow
Wrapped in the touch
 of your precious pearls
I've squeezed this life
 far too many times
You are not my poison,
Hardly. You've been my
 heart twice;
After Hamlet, your
 little feet frozen and
 oh those arms, magic.
Rome at Christmas,
 looking madly for a drink
 I was the messy fool
 You, in lace.
My only poison in L.A.
has been the times
 between the letters.
Today,
You were my heart again.

⁸⁹ Los Angeles, 1982. For Jody Van Der Koort. We met again in Rome when I was visiting at Christmas. She got all dressed up for the “date” and I showed in my LA punk gear and eyeliner, and all I wanted to do was get drunk. I don't really even remember how it ended. But she wrote me a nice letter that spring and didn't hold a grudge, which I appreciated.

Something Else⁹⁰

A glimpse and the eyes are gone
Later told and never seen.
Our tragedy is in your books
so full of looks and smiles., with
words and exits that walk our halls,
silent ones, that taped a flower to a door⁹¹
or brave ones, that dared not ask to stay.

⁹⁰ Los Angeles, 1981. Another Susan Scott poem.

⁹¹ Yeah, I did that.

When I Saw My Father⁹²

I've found my days in
the life of your eyes.
What was lost, is frost.
What he had, was sad.
Now this, Lady I whisper:
What our tears could never
hide behind our years –
Do not speak at night,
behind the sheets and dreams,
for human voices wake us
and bring the beating waves
upon our matted mingling hair.

⁹² Los Angeles, Circa 1983. No idea what the references are or even who it was written for. All I know is I totally knicked the last lines from Dylan Thomas.

Balcony Fortune⁹³

Oh, but rocks, you who know
The evils of my day, canst thou not
Be alone with my rose,
My sweet crushed lady in the press?
And you who shine,
Will you cover her with silver
And let the laurels lie upon her?
Let me like in the vat, a bloated catfish,
With a bent fin in the darkness.

⁹³ Los Angeles, Circa 1983. No context or ideas about the who and the whys. But I like the images.

Reconciliation⁹⁴

“Fear is like a wilderland
Stepping stones or sinking sand”
-Joni Mitchell

You’ve put your finger to my lips
like a movie.
Closing curtains is easier than
slamming doors.

⁹⁴ Los Angeles, Circa 1983. Another Susan Scott poem. Something about how resolving something softly can be double-edged sword.

In Answer to the Silence⁹⁵

So deep, young lady. so deep you
Cannot know, I sunk into
The night to fill this page.

We wash our hands with different soap
Than mortal hands can hope
To find. But we who speak

To stars like newsmen have
Lost our little world. So do
Not ask of weathers and

Murders, sports and suicides,
For there are cats to
Follow and fires to

Light on land without a print,
A blade of grass to burn,
A soul to know our pain.

⁹⁵ Los Angeles, Circa 1983. I remember talking to a girl on a date about this poem, but I don't remember her name or where the imagery came from, other than that it was about defining differences between people that write poetry and those that don't.

To Night⁹⁶

The yellow moon is a spy,
in fact, an eye.

My night:

Yes, your darkness is a sin
Mine, all mine,
with his rusted fingers
and oiled loins,
the guilt returns,
the guilt deserts.

⁹⁶ Los Angeles, Circa 1983. Clearly inspired by Jim Carroll.

AND!⁹⁷

You are Trash!
I'm gonna take you out
Dirty paper poems and!
Crumpled cracker cookies and!
You are Trash!
And I'm gonna take you out
Plastic wrapper rocks and!
You are trash!
And I'm gonna take you out.
News, Booze, Chews and Shoes and!
You are Trash!
And I'm gonna take you out!
Coffee grounds (gonna take you out)
Egg shells (just like mama said):
Take out that Trash!

⁹⁷ Los Angeles, Circa 1983. This was actually more of a song at some point. But by friend Rueben Aguilera said it was a great poem.

Finished⁹⁸

Closing your preoccupied door
Scattering roses in the hall
Where words and exits walk.

⁹⁸ Los Angeles, Circa 1983. Another Susan Scott poem. This one feels more like fragment of some of the other ones I have included here, so I am not sure why it is a separate entity, but it is.

Another⁹⁹

Your sweet baby oil dreams
come back like curtains,
Cold,
They give me goose flesh.

⁹⁹ Los Angeles, Circa 1984. I know that I wrote this for Georgia, but I don't have an context for the content.

Letter to Anne Sexton¹⁰⁰

Anne, I've bagged our
looks, terrible
within our laws
of empty walls
and starry starry nights

My crazy hand,
My Anne,
I'm no better for this painting
But I do not carry
That dream upon my back,
not anymore at least.

My constructions are
Born of madness
They do not have
That mirror
not anymore at least

I've put the lines
without a thought
upon the canvas
Tough, oh yes
tough as nails

To tack your eyes,
Green, upon the wall.
My stained glass Lady,
Red, I am a pagan
In a watercolor world,
praying for rain.

¹⁰⁰ Los Angeles, Circa 1984. Anne Sexton, American Poet. I had done a charcoal and pastel portrait of Anne Sexton and was haunted by the way it looked back at me. I was giving up painting because it was too hard to be any good at it, and the results challenged my self-esteem, such as it was at the time. Several years later, a pet dog named Dylan jumped up and tore the painting off the wall and ripped it to shreds. I have a photo of the painting that I will include in the final print of this book. Many years, and much sobriety later, I took up painting again to heal my heart during the divorce from Ann.

Untitled¹⁰¹

here I am, wrapped
in my irish colors¹⁰²
and you know, cold.
tonight I'm this
great white float-
ing thing, mad as
a dog. my doctor,
the lady on the
couch, where are
you now? have you
gone? not but the
night between us, I
fear, in fact, I
wrote this.

¹⁰¹ Los Angeles, Circa 1983. I think that I wrote this for Robin, during the long breakup of that year.

¹⁰² An actual Irish flag that I slept under.

Untitled¹⁰³

Candles are out
 Their wax will set off
Alarms
 in my nostrils
(I haven't written like this
 in years)
By beers my speed my art
I said "I have none"
I meant "it was hidden"

"clouds hide stars"¹⁰⁴

I am a star!
and so is she-
I feel I can think, now.

My life is more each day
 A circle
Because of her.

This candle – smell blown out
proves it.

¹⁰³ Los Angeles, Circa 1983. I was very much in love with Robin, but substance abuse was getting very confused with creativity. I actually remember writing this poem, living in my one-bedroom apartment in Mar Vista with no electricity, after taking a large dose of amphetamines and drinking a quantity of beer. I remember being so SATISFIED with it, which makes me sad today. This was still several years before getting sober.

¹⁰⁴ From David Ignatow's poem:

AND THE SAME WORDS

I like rust on a nail,
fog on a mountain.
Clouds hide stars,
rooms have doors,
eyes close,
and the same words that began love
end it
with changed emphasis.

A Little¹⁰⁵

I have but one heart,
with all its runny flaws,
I have but one desire,
and her, I call her
my own, my Robin.

Attention like a puddle
gathers rain
and pours on,
but there is one sea,
and me, I call her Robin.

I have not focused
like this in years,
and still there is desire,
the special drop
The one I call my Robin.

¹⁰⁵ Los Angeles, Circa 1983. Robin and I were engaged at this time.

Robin's Song¹⁰⁶

She was my driver,
my one-club,
The force that brought the day
Across my shoulders
like a raincoat.

You were my tee,
My dawn,
The spot from which I flew,
The constant sprinkle
Through which I ran.

Late September came,
my sweaters shrank,
and my chains, well, they rusted –
Fell off my black boot,
And I was without her.

You became my puddle-skipper;
Puddles so deep I would have drowned
Beneath the weight of her coats.

We sail like good boats,
An effort we knew,
All along.

¹⁰⁶ Los Angeles, Circa 1983. When I met Robin, I was still seeing Cathleen, and we had a clandestine relationship for almost a year before I finally broke up with Cathleen. This poem was about that transition.

first rain¹⁰⁷

after a month of dry days
and a season of barren arid nights,
broken by dry leaves under deer's feet,
and the echo of frog songs from the lake

it rained from midnight on,
wholly wet, holy, wet
this slaking, this thirst dirt
the things forgotten in the dry day's yard

through dirty windows and parched gutters
the calypso drum of water on aluminum
a tympani of cans and car tops
a curious song to wake to.

this novel hum, with its rhythm and song
turns familiar by morning.

¹⁰⁷ Sammamish, WA. Circa 2005

Untitled¹⁰⁸

not twenty steps from the house
you could sit for hours by the ruts and piles
absorbing mid-winter's information

tenacious leaves are whispering above
while some fall like paper gliders,
and some sleep thin and dark beneath your feet

every rock is an aging orator,
a piece of something larger
broken and bulldozed by Precambrian ice

you can grab a handful of this black earth,
incomprehensible, coarse and wet,
the living and the dying together in your fist

the invisible flicker's hammer
and the woodpecker's rapid chores
an aria, modern and flirtatious

¹⁰⁸ Sammamish, WA. Circa 2006