



In Praise of the Commonplace

by
Grampa Gray

A compilation of
prose and poetry
from his witty
newspaper column.
Homespun philosophy
and humorous verse
for the 50 plus crowd.



Another Family Friendly Book from the Family of Man Press

In Praise of the Commonplace

The Ramblings of a Gray-haired Bard!

by
Grampa Gray

**Home spun philosophy and
Humorous, old fashioned,
Bumpity, bump, bump rhyming verse
to
tickle the fancy and
warm the heart.**

Family of Man Press

© 1996, 2003, 2016

Dedication

To the idiosyncrasies
that define each one of us,
and
to the joy and laughter,
that only a genuine appreciation of
our own foibles can bring!

At The Outset

Dear friends,

In *Praise of the Commonplace*, is just that - an unabashed reveling in all that may seem insignificant to many, but which to me brings back fond memories, stimulates my gray matter, or tickles my funny bone.

I write to amuse and stimulate myself, and when others tell me they also appreciate my efforts, I am doubly delighted (although, understand that I would continue writing a verse a day for my own amusement whether or not anyone else was left on Earth!). I make no pretense of writing classy poetry. Instead, I think of what I write as old fashioned, "bumpity, bump, bump, rhyming verse!"

Within these pages you will find pieces that are serious, ridiculous, nostalgic, patriotic and, perhaps, even, downright annoying!! I sincerely hope that you find a few that will hold some important meaning for you. Be advised that I often write with tongue in cheek (which, by the way, makes both whistling while I work and gum chewing, difficult - though ever challenging).

Sincerely,
Grampa Gray

-1- Over the Hill?

I'm probably best described as a rather easy going, bespectacled, white-haired old ham, who truly enjoys life. Early on, I discovered that for life to really be enjoyable, one must be willing to work at it. And so I do! I search out the wonderful, the beautiful, the mysteries of life. I treasure love, caring, joy, compassion, and delight in my own foibles and blunders. I respect and stand in awe of nature. Through my homespun, folk poetry, I try, with humor and good intentions, to share my zest for life, and to sing the praises of the commonplace. It pleases me that my work, in addition to having been reviewed as "enjoyable" by most, has also been variously referred to as "unique," "cockeyed," "wonderfully weird," and "addlepated."

This first poem, I wrote many years ago just for fun. You may recognize its message, if not its original form.

Over the Hill?

When folks mature to my age,
We're o're the hill, they say.
I'd rather think it's just a stage
When calmer games, I play.

I really don't feel old, but still,
I hasten to admit,
It's better to be o'er the hill,
Than to be under it !!!

Seeing the World through the eyes of children presents, perhaps, the only truly unclouded view. I enjoy tying my childhood memories to my present - helps keep things in perspective.

Spitting

Boy! How I used to love to spit,
When five or six or so,
And I must say, 'twas good at it -
As little spitters go!

I spat again, the other day.
'Twas great! It really flew!
I hit that target straight away.
My dentures hit it, too!

"True" poets find the beauty in already beautiful things,
and write about it with elegant words, painting splendid
mental pictures that flow as if from golden tongue. I admire
them for their precision and metaphoric skill. "Folk" poets,
like I, find the beauty in the mundane - the common place -
and praise its, to oft, hidden beauty, in more rustic beat and
time-worn rhyme.

Welcome to the realm of the common place.

2- New Is Good?

There is good news and bad news at my house today. I'm
the proud owner of a brand new pair of shiny, scuff-free shoes.
Unfortunately, that also means I now have to begin breaking
them in. Ouch! My old ones are so comfortable - holey soles
and all! It made me begin thinking that new, may not always
be better, after all.

New Is Good?

Just look around and you will see -
Once everything was new.
New babies met with awe and glee-
There once, were me and you.

The car, once washed each week with care.
The bike - no dents or rust.
The house. That fav'rite easy chair.
The good friend's love and trust.

New babies? - helpless as can be!
New cars need breaking in.
A house, a home just cannot be
'Til many moons have been.

Takes time 'tween strangers 'til they're free
To feel that trust abides.
Most everything that's new, you see,
Needs time to hit its stride.

Though new bike's long on looks and style
Takes time to ride it right.
And easy chairs take quite a while
'Til fit each curve at night.

New workers at the fast food place,
Take time to learn the ropes.
The little leaguer rounds the base
Just filled with unmet hopes.

It's only well worn parts, I'm told
That mesh just right. So, Grin!
It's not, you see, that we are OLD,
We're just well broken in!!!

Like you, perhaps, on some days I tend to feel more
broken in than on others!

-3- Ah! Excellent!

A long-faced neighbor boy, ten or so, recently confided, to me, "Everything I do is wrong. I mess up more than anybody I know." My response to him was, "Ah! Excellent!" It was met with furrowed brow, and a somewhat sarcastic, "Are you weird, or what?"

I tried to explain how I view my own mistakes. - That often, it's only by being willing to make errors that we can begin sorting through all the possible choices on the way to finding the correct path or answer. I showed him the box of rejection slips I have received from publishers over the years. "Where would I be if I'd have just given up after the first one (or fifty)?" He began remembering about learning to skate and mastering the multiplication tables. We swapped more personal foibles and giggled, together, about them. We both grew to understand life - and each other - a bit better that afternoon.

Ah! Excellent!

I'll bet you've noticed how some folks
Miss life's best lessons - all.
Can't see their own mistakes as jokes,
But just things they appall

Now, personally, I enjoy
My errors, every one!
You see each error I employ
To bring new smarts and fun!

Mistakes are merely signposts set
Along life's paths and streets,
That say, "Nice try, and please don't fret,
But this try met defeat."

"Let's try again some other way.
You've just learned something fine
About what NOT to try today,
So celebrate that find!"

When these grand errors come your way,
Don't fret and just see red -
Relax! Be glad! And proudly say,
"Ah, Excellent!" instead!!!

Those days when I find that I have done very few things
that call up the "Ah, Excellents", I fear I probably haven't
grown very much. I wish you dozens each and every day!

-4- The Chicken Or The Egg?

Have you noticed how uncomfortable some folks become when there isn't an immediate answer to a question or an obvious solution to a problem? Often, it seems they'd rather hitch onto most any answer, however farfetched, than continue feeling anxious over not knowing. I'm lucky, I suppose, because I have always been absolutely fascinated by the unknown. Instead of a chill, it gives me a thrill - something new and mysterious out there to contemplate! I realize this isn't everybody's cup of tea. In fact, you may well prefer facts, truth and certainty yourself. That's fine, but today, just humor me, okay?

The Chicken Or The Egg?

Now, which came first, do you believe,
The egg or chick - full grown?
Became, when younger, my pet peeve -
Would not leave me alone!

This controversy - eons old -
Just seems to never end.
Proponents argue, loud and bold!
Their points of view, defend.

It's like so many times, I s'pose,
When we can't understand.
Folks choose up sides 'cause, goodness knows,
Some answer we demand!

I've long been fascinated, friends,
By how most folks have felt
That we must choose from just two ends
For problems we are dealt.

"Two sides to every issue," We
Have heard since time began.
Perhaps, to search for ten would be
A more productive plan.

Now, though the question did seem moot,
My being I immersed
And solved this chicken-egg dispute -
Found eggplant had come first!!!

And then, of course, (for those of us who tend to delight in
the perplexities of nature) there are the acorn and the Oak, the
tulip and its bulb, and even the mother and her child! Hmmm!

-5- Leave it to a six-year old!

For me, nature's grandeur is at once wonderful and baffling. I used to wrestle with the "whys" and "hows", but now I'm often content to just sit back, enjoy, and appreciate. I recall struggling with the "big" questions of the universe early in life - I suppose most youngsters do. Often, I would devise ingenious solutions that were, momentarily at least, quite satisfying.

Leave it to a six-year old!

'Twas so confused, when just a kid
'Bout contradicting facts.
Why God and Mother Nature did
Exactly the same acts

Now, which one really made it snow?
Which turned Fall leaves to gold?
Which made cool evening breezes blow?
Which made the tiger bold?

I asked my Dad. "It's God," he'd say.
Mom? "Mother Nature, Dear."
If grownups were confused this way,
Small chance I had, I feared!

When six, the answer came to me.
They share control of life,
'Cause God and Mother Nature, see,
Are really, Man and Wife!!

If you are past fifty (pardon the expression!) I suppose you've noticed how much easier it was to be dead certain about things back when you were young. I wonder when that change occurs - we're young; then we're old. Perhaps we're just too busy in between to notice the change. I guess I'm lucky. I remember that exact moment when I realized I was no longer a spring chicken.

Golden Oldie

My radio gave me the clue.
I'm old, I must admit!
Their Golden Oldie was so new
I'd never heard of it!!

The degree to which an individual feels no all-consuming need to solve each of life's conundrums, may well be the ultimate test of maturity. Perhaps an important aspect of wisdom, is the art of being able to accept - for the moment at least - the unexplainable as just that - unexplainable.

-6- Wisdom

A teen-age friend dropped by last evening as he often does when there is something on his mind. As usual, we talked for quite a while about a lot of things. As usual, I have no idea which one of those topics had been at the top of his agenda.

Before he left he asked, "How did you become so wise?" I guess I had never thought of myself as wise. - after all, that's reserved for old people, and surely I'm not

Anyway, it took me back to the chats I'd had with my Grampa. He amazed me with his wisdom. Now, many years later, there I was, amazing Mark (and even more, I'm sure, myself!).

Wisdom

Now, I don't mean to cast a doubt
On Mother Nature, Friends.
She seems to be most wise about
The way, most things, she tends!

With love, imbues the teen-age hearts!
Makes oldsters, Grandfolks, great!
To couples - young - new babes imparts!
See, mostly, she's first rate!

But on this wisdom thing, I'm 'fraid
Her error, can't ignore!
It doesn't come 'til one has greyed,
Though needed, long before!

When young, and fateful choices must
Be made most every day,
'Bout all kids have in which to trust
Is plain dumb luck, I'd say!

Then, later on, when life's most done
And wisdom does appear,
We only need to use it one
Or two times every year!!

So, Mother N, I've this to say,
"Reverse this thing you've done!
If wisdom transplants you'll okay,
A donor, I'll become!!!"

In many ways, I suppose, all of us with gray hair have done our bit to impart whatever wisdom we may have gained, through our insightful commentaries to the youngsters who sought (or were forced to hear) our tutelage. Looking back it still seems to me that a simple, straightforward, transfusion would be a whole lot less nerve racking for all concerned!

-7-"Fido"

It is a rare and wonderful experience, to meet someone for that very first time, and instantly become their true and lasting friend. Most friendships take more work than that. Tolerance, patience, compromise and occasional forgiveness are more typical.

I've been fortunate to have so many fine and dear friends. It's been said that most of us have fewer than a half-dozen "best" friends in a lifetime. I suppose then, I've had my quota, but I just can't seem to stop looking. Who knows what wonders that a smile, a tip of the hat, or a kind word may bring?

"Fido"

I walk each morning - rain or shine -
And though routes change each day,
I usually stroll by twelve-ten Pine -
(Their dog scares most away).

This huge, black, ugly, snarling mass
Runs loose behind the fence.
He snorts and jumps there as I pass.
(He makes most walkers tense!)

I always stop and talk with him,
Reach out, keep cool and calm.
Still, seems he'd tear me limb from limb -
If but could grab my palm!

I think we're getting closer, though
He still will bark and wail,
But now, as he puts on his show,
He also wags his tail!!!

I understand "Fido's" response. His job is to alert his owners. The complete lack of response I get from some of the

other folks I meet, however, I really don't understand quite so well.

Greetings

I wave or smile at all I meet.
Most wave or smile, too.
For those who won't, my hail, repeat,
I feel so bad, don't you?

I wish that they could come to learn
Grand feelings deep within,
When one, most simply, does return
A nod, a wave, a grin.

It's like a silent bond 'cross space -
A message clear and strong
About just how that smiling face
Moves trust, and peace along.

Friendship and friendliness, whether long term, or fleeting, play an enormously important role in our feelings of security, self-worth, importance and acceptance. So, let's each do our parts to improve the mental health of our fellow men: Flash everyone you meet! (A smile! Flash a smile!)

-8- Housework!

Not long ago, Charley, a life-long friend, was lamenting that things weren't like they had been when we were growing up. I chided him. "You mean you really miss that outdoor plumbing, non-air conditioned homes in the summer, and winter wood chopping?" Seems that wasn't what he had in mind!

"I mean nothing stays the same," he explained. "You just can't count on anything, anymore! Friends are gone or moved away. The music on the radio has become obnoxious. People take advantage of one another. What's left to count on?"

This one's for you, Charley!

Ode to Housework!

Of cleaning, dusting, dishes, beds -
I sing their praises, clear!
Can't understand in this old head,
The jeers toward them I hear!

Quite early on, I learned of life,
There's not much that's for sure.
With great unknowns in joy and strife
One can't predict life's tour.

Aside from death and taxes (which
Are not much fun - though sure!)
One can predict, without a hitch,
That housework will endure.

So, long ago, it came to me
That since our need is great
To feel secure 'bout something, see,
Let's, housework, celebrate!

With certainty, I know each day
Those cobwebs will return,
And ruffled beds are here to stay -

The floors demand their turn.

Dear Housework, I salute you, friend!
Can count on you each day!
Excuse me, now, I GET to tend
My floors and beds - Hoo-ray!!!

(I know. I hear you loud and clear. You're beginning to understand why my somewhat eccentric take on life has been referred to as addlepated .)

-9- Exceptions to the Rule

One of the most confusing phrases I encountered, as a youngster, was this: "There are exceptions to every rule." I soon discovered that was one of those sayings apparently not intended for me to use. It seemed that every time I tried to invoke it I only got myself deeper into trouble. My teachers and Principal could use it. Mother could use it. Father could use it. So could my big brother (when Mother and Father weren't around). But not me. Everyone in my life seemed to possess some magical veto power over my attempts to employ it.

One day, when I was eight, it all came clear to me.

Exceptions to the Rule

When young, I noticed rules were strange -
They're used, 'til times when you'll
Want things forbidden. Then they change.
"Exceptions to the rule."

'Twas told it's wrong to curse and spit,
To gamble, play the fool.
But what I witnessed didn't fit -
Exceptions to the rule?

When diet plan said, "No peach pie,"
But, seeing it, Mom drooled,
She'd set aside that part and sigh -
Exception to the rule?

My teacher said, "No chewing gum.
Or you'll sit on the stool!"
One day I saw her chewing some -
Exception to the rule?

Advanced allowances? No way !!!
Another rule quite dual.
Dad borrowed from my bank one day.
Exception to the rule?

Seems most folks can (except for me!),
Change rules to be their tool!
I s'pose that shows that I am the
Exception to the rule!!!

Having been the exception to the rule most of my life, I have grown to become quite fond of the status. It allows me to do things most other people couldn't get away with. But, when I do it, folks just snicker fondly and say, "That old Grampa Gray - what a character." (If they only knew the half of it!)

-10- Hats And Boys And Girls And Stuff

When I was ten, I had my first opportunity to attend a summer camp. It sat way back in a magnificent forest, on the edge of a beautiful, deep blue lake. We slept in log cabins, cooked over open fires, and built tree houses. It was great! I remember thinking, "Just ten guys doing the stuff guys like to do. Not an incomprehensible girl around! Why not just live here forever!"

When 16 I decided not to return to Wilder-Camp. After all, who wanted to be cooped up for six weeks with ten other smelly guys and no mystifying females anywhere to be found?

Incomprehensible? Mystifying? Will we ever understand?

Hats And Boys And Girls And Stuff

Now, gals have always had to take
Much ribbing 'bout their hats!
Too big! Too many! Goodness sake!
But folks, here are the facts!!

From time a boy first sits up straight,
Until he's ninety-nine,
His hats, to him, are sacred - Great!
To criticize - a crime!!

Guys never wear them straight and trim.
(Which women seem to hate!)

When young, one's Mom adjusts the brim.
When old, "made-right" by mate!

About gal's hats, we guys just joke,
'Cause we can't touch or grouch.
If we'd do that to womenfolk,
We'd end up on the couch!!!

The male will never ask the way!
Same dress, two gals won't wear!
So, must, if jointly we're to play,
Find other things to share.

Dear folks, the moral here, you see,
Is, since in many ways,
The sexes never will agree,
To argue, never pays!

Of course, I've found over the years that arguing with anybody, seldom pays. I always try to let the other guy get it all out of his system first. Then, with a calm and pleasant manner, and in one short and to the point phrase, I state my own view as merely one possible alternative to his. Tell somebody they're wrong, and they'll never come around. Be interested in what they have to say, and quite often, they'll actually listen to you.

-11-Time is my Friend

When my wife was alive, we had a deal: Whenever one of us found the other moping around or just twiddling their thumbs we'd kick them where it did the most good. I never dreamed how difficult it would be to effectively kick myself in that same spot! I'm learning!!

Doesn't time pass slowly when we allow ourselves to just sit around being bored? On the other hand, days, and even years, just zoom by when we are busy or having a good time. This poses a dilemma, I suppose, for those among us who, on the one hand, bemoan how fast time flies and yet, on the other, feel the need to drag life out for as long as possible.

An idle, boring existence can, indeed, drag a life out for an eternity - but what a dreary eternity! And, perhaps, a busy, happy, productive life does seem to near its end far too soon - but what a life it's been!!!

Time is my Friend

When young, time seemed to just drag on.
"Oh, when will childhood end?"
Grand patience, would, from those years dawn
You see, Time was my friend.

Respect, I sought at twenty-one.
On age, though, that depends.
With time it came, through life well done -
You see, Time was my friend.

At thirty-five, my fam'lie's needs
Required me to blend
The best I'd gleaned from life and creeds -
You see, Time was my friend.

I'm old now, but no more feel vexed.
Instead, I see this trend:
Each year prepares me for the next -
You see, Time is my friend.

So, who should care if I've now two
Or ten years left to tend.
Today I have grand things to do,
All thanks to, Time, my friend!

I've heard people say they'd never want to be a kid again. I suppose I tend to feel that way, too, although if I could go through it all again, knowing what I now know - well, that would probably just take a lot of the fun and adventure out of it. Best leave time alone, I guess.

-12- Shoveling Snow

Back in the old days, when I was growing up, natural disasters (acts of God, as we called them) made us all want to pull together - help one another in all possible ways. - Floods, fires, blizzards - made no difference. We would never have thought of profiting from such an occurrence. If anything, folks gave away those wares and services from which they usually gleaned their livelihood. Back then, other people were, ultimately, the most precious commodity we had.

What's happened, folks? What can we do today to help instill and restore those feelings of love and oneness?

Shoveling Snow

I loved the snow, when just a lad.
It made the World so bright!
My friends and I were always glad
To shovel off that "white".

We'd work from daybreak doing walks,
'Til just too cold we got.
Then breaks, where oldsters lived. We'd talk.
They'd serve us cocoa, hot!

'Bout five AM I'd always start
At Dr. Connor's place,
So he could tend to cold and heart
'Case crises, some would face.

I'd move along to milkman Brown's.
Get Gramma Wilson's done.
'Fore long, I'd worked my way down town.
I'd helped, yet had such fun!!

The Townsfolk were appreciative,
Though 'twas just understood
That, shov'ling time, each kid would give.
It still made me feel good!

The times have changed, I am afraid!
When under snow, now stuck,
Some kids still come to offer aid,
But they expect ten bucks!!!

Actually, last winter the asking price was twenty. I wasn't sure whether to respect them as blossoming entrepreneurs, be angry at them for trying to take advantage of me, or feel sorry about the lack of compassion and feelings of human responsibility in their upbringing. In the end, I shoveled out by myself. It took some time - my last shovel full coincided with the last wisp of the melting snow. It brought back wonder-filled memories (and throbbing pains in places long forgotten).

-13- A Store by any other Name

The World has been an exciting place during my lifetime - from horses to cars to planes to shuttles to space probes beyond our solar system. From telegraph to radio to TV to personal communicators. From big black 78 RPM records to LP's to tapes to CD's and beyond. From mono to hi fi to stereo to surround sound to something called virtual reality.

I've dealt with all those changes pretty well, I think. I've always appreciated real progress. So, these days, it's really not all the new products that are confusing. I get stumped trying to figure out which store I now must go to in order to purchase them!

A Store by any other Name

We used to know just where to shop -
For nails, the hardware store,
The grocery for milk and pop,
To Sears, for clothes I wore.

These days, to shop - a mystery !!
In hardwares, plants abide.
One buys books at the grocery,
And Sears, your house will side!

The movie videos I buy?

McDonalds is the place.
(My VCR got fed the fries -
Stuffed Tarzan in my face!!)

My Car Wash sells me gifts and toys,
The filling station, bread,
Insurance from my paper boy!
(There's spinning in my head!)

Don't get me wrong. I think it's swell -
Convenience is real "rad".
I'm thinking soon each store will sell
All items to be had.

Perhaps someday we'll all reside
In one big dome-topped store.
(Just hope they'll let me sleep beside
The "Old Men's" rest room door!)

My books have fallen prey to the very same phenomenon,
now being on sale in a wallpaper store, an antique gallery,
restaurants, quick stops, as school fundraisers, on the web, and
as amazing as it may seem, even in few bookstores.

-14- Sky Blue?

I'm sure, that you, like me, have also noticed, how we often just take things at face value - accept what we've been told without question - without any real further investigation or contemplation.

It probably makes life simpler that way. There seem to be so many other things we are required to question and dissect, and upon which we must pass judgment as we grow up.

I suppose it's a form of trust, isn't it. The ability to trust is, I'm convinced, essential for the good, productive life. Just the same, I derive great satisfaction from poking around at things I've always believed were true - just to make sure for myself!

Sky Blue?

When young and grownups asked of me,
"What color is the sky?"
"It's blue," I'd say with certainty!
No more, so sure, am I!

Before the dawn breaks in the East
An inky black is spread.
Then soon, we're served a color feast
Of orange, yellow, red.

Most days the fluffy clouds that float
Are shades of grey and white.
But clouds, when splashed by sun, I note,
Let pinks and golds take flight.

On winter days the skies are grey.
In spring, they're lightest green.
In autumn, summer's blue gives way
To shades we've seldom seen.

Some sunset hues, on hazy days
Aren't now in common use.
It's then, the Master Painter plays
With fuchsia, mauve and puce!

Today, when asked about the sky,
Will still reply, "It's blue."
That satisfies the other guy,
Though I know, it's not true!

There are times, of course, when going into detail about the actual state of affairs, is both unwanted and uncalled for. Woe be unto the person who takes at face value, the question: "Well, how are you doing, today?" It's not a genuine question - just a way of acknowledging that you are somehow important to the other person. I always answer, "I'm just super, and glad to that you are, too."

-15- The "Truth" about Youth

When small, I just loved listening to the stories my Grampa would tell about when he had been a boy. The things he had done. The places he had visited. Just how life had been way back then. Sometimes, amazed, I would ask, "Is that really how it was?" "Oh yes," he'd reply with grand assurance.

Not long ago I was recounting some of my own adventures as a five-year old, to a young neighbor boy. With eyes as big as the proverbial saucers, he asked, "Is that really how it was?" "Oh yes," I replied with grand assurance!

But later on, I got to thinking ...

The "Truth" about Youth

I used to marvel at the way
My Gram remembered things.
Her life had been just great, she'd say!
(No bruises? bumps? or stings?)

At five, when I'd recall my day
'Twas hurts and fears I'd list.
But Gram recalled the loving way
Her Grandson hugged and kissed!

This morning - washer wouldn't start!
At noon - my sink got plugged!
Tonight, the mem'ry in my heart?
How Grandson kissed and hugged!

Although I know at five, got scared -
At ten I broke a bone.
But all in all, just fine, I've faired,
And joy has set the tone.

It's only now that I can see
What Gram, herself, had done:
Let go of fears and skinned-up knee,
And focused on the fun!

Life's history itself is made
From shadows of our youth.
With time, those mem'ries stretch and fade.
What's left? Just happy "truth"!!!

Long ago I learned the futility of wallowing in the unpleasant side of life. Each night, now, I run through my check list of those things I try to do each day to make the world a better place than I found it that morning. Most nights I can drift off to sleep feeling pretty good about myself. It sure beats worrying and counting sheep...counting sheep...counting sheep...

-16- May your birthday be your Friend

A friend of mine turns thirty this week. She's horrified beyond description! Another friend turned seventy-five yesterday. He's fascinated and delighted! Perhaps perspectives change over the years, although I have reason to suspect the gentleman reveled in his thirtieth as well.

Some folks just don't seem to ever get this birthday thing into proper perspective. Once the birthday passes they fret for six months because they just got older, and then, for the next six, worry about the one upcoming!

Let's see what we can do about all this.

May your birthday be your Friend

The birthday - dreaded by a few
Who just don't understand
It's not a time for feeling blue,
But celebration, Grand!!!

Though birthdays may not seem a joke,
Please don't become forlorn,
'Cause 'less you've had a birthday, folks,
You just were never born!

You never got to have a cake,
To blow the candles out,
To have the party, goodness sake,
With all your friends about!

You never reached that sweet sixteen,
Or driver's license got,
Became the dance's king or queen -
You really missed a lot.

Be pleased when birthday time rolls 'round,
Another year to cheer,
Just filled with pleasures yet unfound,
So stow that birthday jeer!!!

This birthday correlation, Friend,
Holds true consistently:
The one who has the most, will tend,
To live the longest, see!!!

I just had my sixty-first, or was it seventy-first, or am I off by another ten years? I figure whether I have counted accurately or not really doesn't change a thing. I'm still not sure what I want to be when I grow up, but that'll take care of itself. Today, I'm who I am regardless, and happily, I'm pretty darn satisfied with how I'm turning out!

With all my heart I wish the same for you.

-17- So far, So good!

I held a new-born baby last evening - so helpless! Thank goodness for mothers. That started me thinking about my own childhood, and all of the dangerous adventures I, somehow, survived - cave exploration, shooting the rapids (without a boat), gravel pit swimming, six-foot stilts, cliff climbing, and a terrible house fire one Christmas Eve.

Surviving adolescence was even more miraculous - fast cars, hitch-hiking, taking on all dares, speaking my mind to far too many unimpressable thugs twice my size!!

After that unsettling trip down memory lane, I found myself pinching my arm, to see if I were really still here! (I was!!!)

So far, So good!

I got to thinking, though now old,
Most things have gone my way.
I'll knock on wood and state quite bold -
So far, so good, I'd say!

My hair is mostly still in tact,
Although it has turned gray.
Can still perform my stage show act -
So far, so good, I'd say!

My teeth are mine (though 'bout that jest!),
My joints still let me play.
Can button up as I get dressed -
So far, so good, I'd say!

And though my glasses now are tri's,
At least can see that way!
Last week, at cards, won booby prize!
So far, so good, I'd say!

I love my life! I feel just great!
I paint! I sculpt in clay!
I've known and loved a marv'lous mate!
So far, so good, I'd say!

A lovely lady - fun and bright -
Just winked at me that way!
Found flames of passion still will light!!
So far, SO GOOD, I'd say!!!

"I've been alive a long, long time," so said an eight-year old to me not long ago. I agreed and asked what he thought about life. The question seemed a strange one to him at first, but once he got into it, he obviously enjoyed thinking about it. He determined life had been pretty good - so far. He asked me about my thoughts on the matter. My response skipped over the details, and just went right to the heart of the matter: "So far, so good, I'd say." "We're pretty lucky guys, huh?" was his reply. A new bond was tied that evening between two old friends.

-18- Banners

I recall once asking my Grampa, "Gramps, if every country believes that their flag is the best, who is really right?" (I'm told I seldom asked easy questions at that age!) His answer, confusing at the time, now seems profound: "Everyone and no one," Grampa replied.

He realized that, once reared within a given culture, we have little chance of coming to embrace any other set of beliefs. What we've always known and learned as right, truly seems the best. How differently we each would think, if we had but been raised elsewhere. - Iran, India, China, the ghetto, the farm, the city, or in the big house on the hill.

But even within each culture, - country, if you will - there resides a grand diversity of subtle variations on those basic beliefs.

Perhaps to be totally accurate, we should each create our own, very personal, flag. A flag that just represents our own beliefs. Even then, I suppose we'd have to remake it every few years. Happily, most of us do change and grow!

Banners

I often wonder, 'bout the flags
There flapping in the breeze.
Much more than colored cloth or rags,
Our sense of pride, they please.

It seems to me they just may know
How much they represent.
At ease, stand guard, 'til breezes blow,
Then "snap to" - Proud! Content!

I think a flag looks happiest
When working hard up there -
Rip'ling straight and snapping crisp
With Patriotic flair.

I guess that, like the flag, I too
Am proudest when I dare
To fly my colors, bold and true -
To show I love and care.

What banner do you fly each day -
Through word, intention, deed?
I'm sure, unfurled, yours must display
Grand qualities, indeed!!

It might be fun - a stimulating task - to actually plan and even make one's own flag. What would you include to represent the best of your own accomplishments, values, and dreams?

Among other things, I suppose mine would include symbols of my wife and son and friends, and of the foster children we had in our care. There would be something about a peaceful World and a planet clean and fresh - renewed. There'd be a book and music and art, a large smile and a small frown. Somehow, I would try to symbolize how the lessons of history must be mindfully used to build our tomorrow.

My! My flag would a big 'ol boy, wouldn't it. Perhaps I could cut it down a bit and just symbolize people, love, the Earth, and hope.

-19- Shadows

I recently succumbed to a bout of the flu. I skipped my flue shot this year, because I was convinced it gave me the flu last year. (Doc shook his head and looked at me over his glasses when I told him that!)

The first day I was ailing, my current "best friend" (and constant shadow) - a four year old from next door - thought he would just come over and take care of me. I said, no, he might catch the bug from me and get sick himself. Three days into my chills and fever, the phone rang. It was his little voice that greeted me. "I'm so happy," he announced. "I got the flu all by myself, so now I can come over and take care of you!"

He did! Friends! What would we do without them?

Shadows

The shadow is a wondrous thing,
It comes and goes at will.
To sides of buildings it can cling,
And giant chasms fill.

As clouds advance, their shadows race
Along the ground, below,
Amusing us with games of chase.
No boundaries they know.

They ripple over waves on lakes.
Stand guard on summer day.
They follow robin as she makes
A nest, where eggs she'll lay.

When sun is bright, the shadows seem
To know we need deep shade.
They bring relief from summer steam -
A haven, freely made.

Again, in Winter, shadows know
How dreary is the view,
Just black of trees and graying snow -
So, cast themselves in blue.

The shadow knows just when to play
And when to help, its true.
Much like a fine, best friend, I'd say,
Whose always there for you.

I amused and to some extent amazed myself as I was searching through the verses I have written, to select those that would go into this book. I found that many dozens of them - each one written in a different time and place - ended with the same two lines as does this one.

I have indeed been fortunate to have always had good and caring friends. When young, I determined that it actually made me feel better to be a good friend than to have one, but as I have matured, I have come to fully understand and appreciate how important both sides of a friendship are.

-20- Ode to the "Izzle" words

When I was fifteen, I spent my life being silly. - Doing outrageous things. Having fun. Telling outlandish stories. 'Whooping it up,' as we would say. Nothing dangerous (well, not too dangerous, since it has been established that I did live through it!).

Today I woke up age fifteen again. I've been giggling and having the most delightfully absurd flashes of 'brilliance!' I've noticed that the words I use, are a good reflection of my overall mood. Today those words are absolutely nonsensical!

Although I haven't yet written your verse today, I truly do apologize, ahead of time, for what is most certainly to follow.

Ode to the "Izzle" words

Drizzle, fizzle, sizzle, frizzle -
Unique and charming sounds!
Not drab or pale, these words-izzle.
Such sounds should know no bounds!

So, folks, I find this very sad!
Too few, these izzles are.
Could speak such beauty, if but had,
More izzle words to star!

Most izzles seem to be 'bout acts.
So let's create our own!
Like when we take a quiz on facts,
A quizzle's going on!

When flushed and faint, a person feels,
And World goes spinning 'round,
A dizzle happens as one reels
And falls upon the ground.

The guys who wed Miss Taylor, folks,
Have pulled a Lizzle, yes?
That ceremony is (no joke!), -
A Lizzeling, I guess!

So, help our English language grow !
New izzle words create!!
Make dictionaries overflow!!!
You'll join the Izzlers, great!!!

Just for Fun

Some folks seem far too serious.
Each game played must be won.
That leads to lives most drear-ious -
Try playing just for fun!

When smiling, you're impervious
To losses, every one.
Can lose those games continuous -
Who cares, when just for fun!

If find you're still "must-win-ious"
Aft' giving *fun* a run,
Examine your ego-ious.
YOU may just BE NO FUN !!!

I warned you! Some of my greatest accomplishments in life, I believe, have had their initial spark in moments of sheer (or at least, near) delirium.

It is sad, I think, to encounter people who are so uptight or overly controlled that they are unable to just let go and see what wondrous things may develop. I don't intend to imply that we should not all remain within certain bounds of decency and decorum, and I do believe we must pick and choose, quite thoughtfully, the times and places for such spontaneity. But, it seems to me, that to live a life without those looser times, somehow diminishes ones humanity.

-21- The Sidewalk

You may get tired of hearing about my morning walks, but that's usually when I get the inspiration for these little chats. My friends, the dogs and cats, the daffodils and fences, neighbor kids, misty days, mighty oaks - they all spring into perspective as I encounter them on my walks.

It came to me, just recently, that one of my very best companions, very closest cohorts, most trustworthy accomplices, on these treks, is someone about whom I've never waxed poetic!

Forgive me, old friend. Today, it's your turn!

The Sidewalk

Besides one's walking shoes and hat,
A walker's truest friends,
Are sidewalks - concrete pathways - that
Continue to Earth's end.

Well, maybe not way to the end
But plenty far for me.
I'm lucky! My town's do extend
As far as I can see.

They take me to the grocery store,
To picture shows for fun.
They help me meet nice folks, galore -
Some walk. Some jog. Some run.

The sidewalk really doesn't mind
If I walk fast or slow,
Or if I stop to see what kind
Of flowers, 'side him grow.

Dependable? You bet he is!
He's there each day - no doubt!
And never moves or hides - Gee Whizz!!
I've never seen him pout!

Just wish that walks could find a way
To, somehow, help me learn,
When I'm halfway to pooped, each day,
So back toward home could turn!!!

By the time I do get back home, that front door looks
mighty good!

Ode to the Door

The door, a truly wondrous thing,
Part wall, and partly hole.
Allows us, things, inside, to bring,
Keeps out the Winter's cold.

Quite patiently, it waits for us.
Complaints are never heard.
When snows swirl 'round, we hear no fuss,
When rain, no unkind word

.
So, Doors, my hat, I doff to you!
You're like one's best old friend.
You never pry, but right on cue
Your helping hand will lend.

The things we take for granted, huh? And how about those
workman who made the door, installed it, poured and
smoothed the concrete for the walk, and the former home
owner and taxpayers who footed the bills? A thanks from me
to them.

-22- Passion ?

My place is at the back of a large lot - a second story apartment overlooking an alley. (Just trust me on this. It's delightful, both in style and view!) On Spring evenings, I can often look down on young lovers expressing their affection to one another there in the modest privacy of the alley.

How that takes me back! I would have needed that kind of privacy just to hold a girl's hand, and perhaps steal a single peck to her cheek! Times have changed! ... I wonder, do you suppose it's just the times that have changed, or has passion itself, also changed. ... It's all coming back to me now. ... Just the times, I guess!!

Passion ?

I turned my range on yesterday,
The flames danced high and blue.
Reminded me when passions lay
Quite bare, back in my youth.

Most lasses, then, my range could light.
The flames of love grew high,
Obscuring everything from sight!
I craved their lips, their sigh!!

Though fire on my range has cooled,
Still flickers deep inside.
Be warned, good ladies, don't be fooled!
Grand passions still abide!

If flames of passion, now, I'd have,
How'd I react? Not sure!
I'd prob'ly search the drawer for salve,
That puzzling itch to cure!

Passion Through the Ages

At four, I kissed my friend's hurt knee.
At ten, I hit her arm.
As teen, I held her close to me,
And told her of her charm.

Then later, passion blended with
The love I felt for her.
And soon dispelled the age old myth
That passions had to stir.

When old, my love, I'd still adore.
We'd sit and talk and all.
It seemed we once did something more.
These days, though, can't recall.

Girl Watching

A teen asked, "Do old guys like you
Still watch the girls?" I said,
"My goodness, Son, of course I do,
I'm only OLD, not DEAD!"

I watched a couple just last night.
I searched, then, for my pen.
About their passions I would write.
Which one's the girl, again?

The hair on both was shoulder long.
Both wore an earring - neat!
With jeans alike, I asked, what's wrong?
Is gender obsolete?

It seems, perhaps, that this past year
The focus of my sighs,
May not have been on girls, I fear,
But on those stylish guys!

-23- Recycling?

Growing up, I seldom thought of myself as poor. Oh, I knew we didn't have many frills, and that I couldn't have brand new things, but shucks, that way I got to make them for myself. What could be more fun and stimulating than that! It gave my creative juices an early start, for which I'm ever appreciative.

When I wanted something "new", I'd scrounge the parts and build it. When something needed inventing, I'd use what I could find to fashion the parts required for that project. Still, today, I'd rather contrive a gadget myself than go buy it.

I suppose all that was recycling. We called it, making do.

Recycling?

My socks, I darn. My shoes, resole.
I use things, plastic, less.
For bass and rainbow trout I troll -
Recycling? I guess!

As bach'lor, once again, these days,
My paper cups - Oh, yes -
Use each ten times 'fore thrown away -
Recycling? I guess!

I cut the sleeves off winter shirt,
So cool, in Spring, can dress.
I pot my plants in garden dirt -
Recycling? I guess!

Mown grass, quite lazily I'd let
Just lay, I must confess.
Today, for that, high praise, I get!
Recycling? I guess!

I wrap the coffee grounds, each day
In newspapers - a mess!!
For years I've done it. Now they say,
"Recycling, I guess!"

When young, I was a student, grand!
With fatherhood, then, blessed!
A Grampa poet, now's the plan!
Recycling, I guess!!!

As I enter my block, on the return home from my morning walk, I take out a small plastic grocery bag and put into it any litter that I find along the sidewalk and in the ditch beside the road. That keeps my block clean and neat. Sadly, each day there is more litter there for me to pick up.

I was wondering, not long ago, just how high it might have to get piled before folks would cease, so thoughtlessly, throwing things there, like that. There is no need to even contemplate trying it, I suppose. I could never let my little part of the World approach that level of total disregard for the beauty and health of my planet.

-24-"Son" Catcher

Kids! It's been so long ago since I've qualified as one, (physically - not 'at heart,' you understand!) and yet, it seems like just yesterday. I enjoy remembering how it was to be a boy (though I probably don't really remember accurately!). I enjoy remembering about having a son of my very own (well, I did share him with my wife!). These days, I enjoy watching youngsters as they go about doing what kids do best - asking, absorbing, trying, learning, growing, enjoying, being. It's intriguing what we choose to recall!

"Son" Catcher

Before the seat belt came along
Beside me, on the seat
My son would stand. He'd sing a song
And wave to all we'd meet.

Back then, Dads had a built-in trick -
A reflex when they'd brake.
His arm extended right and quick -
A son catcher, 'twould make.

Old habits do die hard, they say.
Still have that reflex knack!
I hit the brakes just yesterday,
And saved my grocery sack!!

Good Deeds

A proud new Cub Scout told me his
Good deeds were done each day!
With puzzled look, he asked, "What is
A good deed, by the way?"

All The Way!

A young friend said, "You're old. That's sad.
Will you soon pass away?"
"If I have made it this far, lad,
I'll make it all the way!!"

Be Nice!

For years, "Be nice," our kids we hound,
So's great to hear folks say,
That when we parents aren't around
They really are that way!!!

World's Greatest Water Balloon

Balloon, with water, I prepared.
For pranking, would be neat!
From upstairs window, aimed with care -
Then missed by seven feet!

Undaunted, I would try again,
New strategy, I'd spin.
I really had no doubt that when
That next try came, I'd win!

I suppose that every generation of adults, as far back as there have been generations, have agreed that they would not want to have to be a kid "these days." Even being one who delights in challenges, I suppose that basically, I, too, fall into that line of thinking. One thing that point of view can bring to life, is to alert the adults to be ever mindful of just how much gentle guidance the younger generation needs to help it traverse its increasingly difficult path. I often hear adults just complain about kids. If growing up truly is so much harder these days, might it not - now more than ever - be our responsibility to share with them our wisdom in gently helpful ways?

-25- Fast Food?

I suppose, to say that patterns of life have changed during these past sixty years, would be an understatement. Wouldn't it. So many fine and exciting things have come along in areas like transportation, medicine, science, communication and especially, in the basic creature comforts. It's a real privilege to have been present during this era.

Some of the changes seem to look pretty good at first glance, but then, upon further reflection, may not be all they're cracked up to be.

Let's see if we can pull one of these things out of the hat for inspection!

Fast Food?

This "fast food" thing confuses me.
I'm not sure what it means.
I put it to the test! You'll see!
Enlisted help of teens.

At five p.m. I sent two guys
With ten bucks in their hand
To go get burgers, drinks and fries
While at my stove I'd stand.

While they were gone, I, burgers made.
Fried taters. Toasted bun.
When they returned from "fast-food raid"
I'd eaten! - Dishes done!

I'd spent a dollar on my fare,
Made mine with far less grease!
They burned much gas - polluted air!
And spent five bucks apiece!

There is an up side to these deals,
Car lovers get a chance,
While eating lunch, to flaunt their wheels -
Their egos thus enhance!!

Perhaps, a definition, new,
Has now been coined, you know -
Like bad means good, and hot means cool -
Fast now means costly slow!!

Today the World seems over run with "experts."
Specialization is the thing. Sometimes it appears that the more
one knows the less one knows. I went in to have a wart
removed and while there asked the doc about a twinge I had
developed in my shoulder. "I don't know about twinges,"
came his reply. Wart specialists? What is this World coming
to? (A phrase I'm all quite certain my own Grampa used more
than a few times!)

Experts!

When hiring those expert men,
I'll give you this one tip.
Some experts are no more than an
Expensive, former drip! (ex-spurts)

(How much worse can it get than for a verse-writing
'expert' to have to explain his own pun?!)

-26- Those Grocery Lists!

I suppose that I do tend to let things excite and amaze me a bit more than most folks, but then, that's just me!

Trips to the larger grocery stores are like adventures to me. So many aisles of so many ungrocery-like items. A forest of huge plants, hardware, a pharmacy of drugs, magazines, books, videos, rental rug shampooers, lottery tickets, toddler play areas, snow shovels, greeting cards, a five and dime store worth of paper, tape, binders, ribbons, and wrapping paper. Some have post offices, money exchanges, UPS drops and, yes, if you search long enough, even food!

My, how my grocery list has changed through the years - even just in the basics!

Those Grocery Lists!

When young, my grocery list, I'd write
In my appointment book.
I ran across stored books last night,
So thought I'd take a look.

One list began with lamb - not lean -
(With mint sauce, served, no doubt!).
Spaghetti sauce, salt pork and beans,
A cake and sauerkraut!

As I recall, with cut off pants
And sweat shirt - tattered hem,
I'd stop to shop as home from dance
I'd drive, 'bout one A.M.

These days, both food and style are
Quite diff'rent from before.
No causal clothes or fancy car.
Buy tasteless foods that bore!

Put in my teeth. Grab Tums, galore,
With care, adjust my toup.
Then off I walk to grocery store,
To buy my chicken soup!

It's not so bad, this diet, bland,
In spite of what I've said.
Tonight I'll have dessert, quite grand!
An apple, sweet and red!!

I am amused with the recent rash of new "acid blockers" that are being mass marketed (and effectively!). These days, we are actually being encouraged to eat those things that we know, ahead of time, truly aren't good for us, because, heck, just take a pill and you won't feel a thing. I guess that's sort of like replacing the electric chair with a lethal injection. First, they put you to sleep, so it won't bother you so much when they finally paralyze your respiratory system. Isn't progress wonderful!

-27- Mirror In The Street

I think I've noticed that those people who are the most easily offended by things others say to, or about, them, are the very same people who, so sadly, have never learned to laugh at themselves.

Personally, I find no one else in my World who does as many strange things deserving of a chuckle, as I do! I had good models, I guess. Although achieving one's goals and reaching one's potential were certainly important in my home, my Mom and Dad always enjoyed their own foibles. As a kid, sometimes I'd go so far as to goof-up just so I could point it out, thereby feeling more like one of the family. They taught me to love and accept myself. I guess that has to come first, doesn't it!

I suppose these poems, then, speak for themselves.

Mirror In The Street

A doll lay in the street - face cracked,
Gray mud, on hair, could see.
From second glance, emerged this fact -
It looked a lot like me!

My Trusty Hammer

I love my hammer - weight and grip-
Just right for me to use.
Been with me life's entire trip.
None other would I choose!

Has had three handles (would not joke!),
And two new heads, you hear!
Who knew that same old hammer, folks,
Would last me all these years!!!

Only As Old As You Feel!

When I awake each morning, I
Am age eighteen once more!
What happens as the day goes by?
By night, I'm eighty-four!!!

How Old?

Some folks say I look eighty-eight.
Some say, "No, fifty-five."
I say that either age is great,
'Cause both mean I'm alive!!

Bending Over

When young, I'd not think twice about
Just bending over, then.
But now, that "journey" stays in doubt
'Til I'm up straight again!

I started musing, yesterday -
"What if I dropped a dime?
Would I bend down or let it stay?"
I thought a long, long time.

Since bending now seems quite a chore,
I'd prob'ly just pretend
I didn't see it there, though for
A QUARTER, I might bend!!!

Who Would I Be?

Pretend I could be anyone.
Let's see, who would I be?
I truly think it is quite won-
derful to just be me!!!

-28- Ode To The Coffee Cup

Webster's Dictionary says that an "ode" is a poem of praise. It appears to me that many of us find it all too easy to overlook some of those common things that deserve our praise. So, I write Odes to them. (Strange? Most certainly! Twisted? Perhaps! Fun? It is for me and I hope for you, also!)

Ode To The Coffee Cup

Behold! The loyal coffee cup!
Complaints, you'll never hear,
While sitting empty or filled-up,
Dependable, it's clear!

So patiently will wait on shelf,
And pleased to hold your brew.
Will never sneak a sip, itself,
Just holds it there for you!

I'm grateful that that cup, though small,
Each day provides the zest
That helps these bones stand straight and tall,
And helps me meet life's test!

So, coffee cup, companion dear,
Though seldom tell you, friend,
Without caffeine you bring, I fear
On worse things I'd depend!!!

Ode to the Paper Clip

When young, I thought the very best
Of all inventions was
The paper clip - I do not jest!
Just think of all it does.

At school it held my papers tight.
Made rings of many styles.
Attached to bow, barrette just right
To win the young girl's smile.

I've used them as a make-shift tack
To hold my tie just right.
And when out camping - fork I'd lack?
'Twould help me take that bite.

And though, I guess, I might survive
Without these clips, I'll say,
It's nice some things, so prized at five,
Are with me, still, today.

Ode To The Ice Cube

The ice cube is a selfless thing,
An altruistic form
That gives its all in one cool fling
To chase away the warm.

Relieves the over-heated brow
And cools the tepid brew.
It ne'er expects to take a bow
Nor asks a "Thanks," from you.

Wish we'd all act as ice cubes do -
Just help for helping's sake.
If that one wish were to come true
Just think the World we'd make!

-29- Plastic or Paper?

Can you imagine the immense burdens of the Presidency? - Protecting our country, our environment, our economy, our health, our pride, our personal integrity. Balancing a runaway budget, and tackling the intricacies of the deficit. Helping to rescue this old World from dozens of bitter, long-standing cultural, religious and ethnic rivalries. And, on top of all this, finding the time and patience to help your daughter with her algebra homework! Mr. President, I salute you!

Well, I'm glad I'm not quite so responsible for those huge and complex problems of the day. My own little daily struggles seem plenty big enough to me.

Plastic or Paper?

The sack-boy at the grocery
Will ask me every day,
"Plastic or paper, will it be?"
A quandary, I say!

I really like that plastic sack
With handle-loops, so strong.
They're easier on my old back.
(But feel, I'm doing wrong!)

The paper bags, I'm told by some,
More bio-friendly are -
That use of plastic sacks is dumb!
That they should all be barred!

I love this Earth, and I would ne'er
Intentionally harm
A single rock or stream, the air,
A lake or lawn or farm but, Gee!

Those paper sacks and I
Just never do succeed!
They're hard to hold. They tear! I try,
But they don't meet my need!

I've fin'lly solved this "bio-plight,"
By fixing burlap sacks
With handles, so they feel just right,
No more, those guilt attacks!!!

And of course, the apparent universal plight of growing
older - remembering!

Did I Tell You 'Bout The Time...?

Say, did I ever tell you 'bout
My old, old, Auntie May?
And of the way she'd tell about
The same things every day!

Mom said that was because she's old'
So that made it okay.
I loved the stories that she told,
So worked out fine that way.

Although now old, it's true that I'm
A mental athalete!
My mem'ry still is in it's prime!
No tales do I repeat!

Say, did I ever tell you 'bout
My old, old, Auntie May . . .

-30- Assumptions

Not long ago, I approached the door to a store at the same time as did a woman - probably in her mid-forties. Out of a life-long habit, I opened the door and beckoned her to enter ahead of me. "I'm capable of opening my own doors," she snapped.

We seemed to have had a clash of assumptions. I assumed that what I did was merely a polite act - the same act I do daily for numerous women, children, men and cats. My intention was certainly not to offend her. She seemed to assume that my gesture implied that I felt she was somehow inept or less able or less worthy than I. I suppose we both erred, didn't we? So sad!

Assumptions

When young, it seemed to me that Dad
Was always on my back!
I really felt it made him glad
To point out skills I'd lack.

At thirteen, when I went to work,
My boss seemed picky, plus!
"Do this. Do that!" My what a jerk!
He loved to fume and fuss!

Miss Priss (that really was her name),
Would mark my papers red.
For every little thing she'd blame,
"She hates me," I had said.

Years later, things came clear to me -
Dad prepped me for life's test!
Boss taught responsibility!
Miss Priss brought out my best!!

Seems judgment should be put on hold
'Til all the data's in,
And that, sometimes, takes years, I'm told -
Through patience, truth, we'll win.

To us, this lesson let me bring -
One all must comprehend!
It is a foolish, dangerous thing
To make assumptions, friend!!!

I enjoyed college. I worked hard to do well. It aggravated
the risibles out of me that those who got D's and those who got
A's, all received the very same diploma.

Diplomas

Diplomas have a fine, rich feel -
A classy tone they set.
But what, for sure, do they reveal?
Some minimum was met!

So, 'fore the doc examines me,
Before "Teach" gets my son,
It's not that "skin" I want to see,
But how well they have done!

Now, though that sheepskin may be fine
As far as it can go -
The most important bottom-line
Is, "How much does one know?"

It has been my observation, that frequently, those without
that sheepskin know a whole lot more about life than some of
those who have it!

Life's Diploma

It seems a shame that we ignore
Those folks who've grown quite wise.
Should be a fine diploma, for
One's Wisdom - life's Grand Prize!!

-31- A Friend By Any Other Name

Recently I was reading that psychologists have found that the name a person uses, helps determine the way he thinks about, and display himself to the world. Apparently some names are more macho, others more sedate. Some are friendly, while others more stern or more fearful or more milk-toast-like.

Although I imagine it isn't really that simple, it does make some sense. I once knew a boy who was called, Rodent, by his family. He did act like one! I wonder which came first?

I suppose that if one likes their name, regardless of what it is, that helps. I happen to like "Grampa!" How about you?

A Friend By Any Other Name...

Each morning as I walk my way
Along the roads and streets,
I tip my hat! "Good morning," say,
To all those whom I meet.

I see one, time-worn, gentleman
Who waves from porch to me,
And two young Mothers out to run
Who smile cheerfully!

The UPS man from his van
Returns my wave each day.
And then, of course, that homeless man
Says, "Hi," - then scoots away.

The pre-school kids all wave and shout
As I pass by their school.
One lad, in wheelchair, on my route,
Will smile - as a rule.

Policemen, taxi drivers all
Return my daily hale.
The kitten, pacing on the wall,
Will purr, when stroke her tail.

Don't know their names, their sign, address -
But they are friends of mine!
One's name, you see, grows meaningless,
When friendship's on your mind.

Early on in life, I learned that true friendship does away
with class boundaries. Rich or poor, college graduate, or
grade school dropout - when you're friends, none of that
matters.

VIP's

When I first learned of VIP's
I was confused, complete.
I thought that everybody, see,
Was really pretty neat!

If only some deserved that "V",
Then what did others get?
An "L", one possibility,
For "less", would stand, I bet.

Or "U" for "Unimportant P's"
Or "N" for "Never I".
Or "S" could be used, if you please,
"Sometime Important Guy".

I thought about this VIP
Thing long and hard when small.
Concluded, if were up to me,
We'd not "IP" at all!

-32- You Do The Best You Can

I saw a re-run on TV of some events from the last Olympics. It is amazing how wonderfully coordinated and talented those youngsters are! Just think of the years they have spent in hard, meticulous training. I do hope they have managed to have a good life away from their event. So often, I've heard, they don't. I have to wonder if it's really worth giving up so many other things in life in order to be one of the best at just one thing. They must think so. I truly hope they have happy, if not full, lives.

Me? I prefer being a dilettante. I'm content to just enjoy doing lots of different things at which I never intend to be really great.

You Do The Best You Can!

At ten, we had an all-school meet.
The hundred yards, I ran.
My fastest dash, still met defeat.
You do the best you can.

At twelve, my essay, teacher praised,
And in a contest, ran.
I won first prize, was proud but dazed -
You do the best you can.

I fell in love with Ginny, Dear,
We were each others' fan.
We loved together forty years -
You do the best you can.

We had a fine, bright baby boy -
New member of our clan.
He turned out great - such fun and joy -
You do the best you can.

I've written stories, poems, books,
Ate tacos - Hot! (Now bran!)
Enjoyed my days (most every one!).
You do the best you can.

I try to bring some grins your way,
But when I fail that plan,
Remember, folks, I'm old and gray!!!
You do the best you can!!!

-33- The Quests

Did you ever discover your Christmas or birthday gifts ahead of time, only to feel the anticipation and excitement of the season quickly drain away? Me too!

Just think of all the drama and wonder we would miss, if we had the power to see into our own future. No dreams left to pursue. No mysteries left to solve. No chances left to take. I'm quite sure that one could have never convinced me of this when I was still a child. Back then, I always knew exactly what I wanted. I knew, without question, how happy I would be if only I could obtain that all important dream-of-the-day.

The Quests

I wanted most of all, when nine,
A bike - bright red and new!
My old one, long since lost its shine -
What fine things we would do!

At ten my dream was still the same -
I worked and saved each day.
The steepest hills with it I'd tame!
For girls, my skills display!

At twelve, that dream was realized!
I'd saved enough at last!
'Twas mine - that bike so long I'd prized.
The joy, though, soon was passed.

Who knew I'd miss my old one so?
New dents would make it seem
That two old bikes I had - you know?
Worse yet, I'd lost my dream?

Make no mistake, I do believe
In building dreams quite grand!
Pursuing them, as life we weave,
Each day, new goals in hand!

But through the years, this truth came clear:
Was not the goals I'd prize.
'Twould be the quests, that I'd hold dear -
Imagine my surprise!!!

Over the years, I have been the ghostwriter of many "autobiographies" for other people. It was never of the stuff they had accumulated that I wrote. It was of their struggles, their accomplishments, their quests and dreams as yet unmet.

One's life is best summarized by the trails he has ridden, the thoughts he has thought, the visions he has formulated, and the reflection he leaves in the full length mirror of time. May your quests be absolutely magnificent and your reflection bright and beautiful!

-34- Fences

Some of you will remember that forty's song entitled, "Don't Fence Me In. - disturbing, no doubt, for the claustrophobic of the World! At any rate, I was noticing all the fences this morning as I took my walk. Stone, wire, wood, concrete, even fence-like hedges of prickly something-or-other.

I began noticing that some were obviously made to keep things in (dogs, small children), and that others were made to keep things out (you and me, I suppose!). Others, appeared to be there merely for ornamentation. I guess I liked those the best.

They reminded me ... well ...

Fences

The fence - a most unique device,
Can keep things in with ease,
Or keep them out (if they're not nice).
Some made, the eye, to please!

Although I know sometimes we need
To fence our precious stuff,
Still, seems a shame, to me, indeed
We oft' can't share enough!

And others hide behind their fence
Afraid outside they'll sight
An angry World - Irate! Incensed!
'Tis sad! (They may be right.)

Those firmly built on fear or hate
Stand generations long.
One's love and reason, subjugate -
A thought-tight fortress - strong!

The fences I enjoy the most
Are made of rails - hand-split.
With plants surrounding every post.
Add charm where e're they sit.

I hope the fences that you meet,
Will all be monuments
To love and beauty - joy complete!
To trust and common sense.

I heard an expert on body language speak not long ago. She was talking about the fences some folks continually build with their bodies - crossed arms or legs, lack of eye contact, never being a listener - all things that tend to put others off, to fence them out and keep them at a distance, either physically or socially. I was glad to hear that my open arms, deep gaze and eagerness to hear what others have on their minds, identifies me more as an open gate than a fence.

Letting others into one's life is just about the easiest treasure to acquire. Oil up those hinges and swing the gates free. Many folks who'd like to come in, are too polite to intrude when they sense the latch string's not out.

-35- Misty Days

Even as a youngster, I had difficulty understanding people who preferred to spend drizzly, hazy days in bed. Now, understand, they certainly have their right to do so. I just can't comprehend why anyone would choose to miss out on such a truly glorious outdoor experience.

You say mine is the minority opinion on this topic. Perhaps! Folks who have known me a long time wouldn't be surprised at that, I guess. The only comment written on my very first report card read: "Your son tends to think in frightfully unnatural ways!" My parents chose to take that as a compliment. I'm quite certain that it was not intended as such!

Misty Days

It's just a misty day, today.
No rain to really see.
"So dark and gloomy," some might say.
Exciting though, for me!

It takes no ingenuity
To grin on sunny days,
But, taps one's creativity
To chuckle through the haze.

This morning, on my damp, chilled walk,
The foliage seemed so pleased!
The wrens engaged in birdie talk
As puddle-time they seized.

The grass just glistened, splendidly.
The sidewalk bricks so red.
The drops from trees splashed gleefully.
As one, all nature wed!

From time to time a single ray
Of sun peeked through the mist.
A subtle, reassuring way
To make sure it was missed.

I urge, when misty days come 'long,
Try seeking beauty there.
Go forth! Observe! Hear Nature's song!
Glimpse joy beyond compare.

I was reading not long ago, that, much to Grandma's dismay, perhaps, there is not one shred of scientific evidence linking being outside on damp and dank days with catching cold or any of the other assorted maladies often attributed to it. In fact, all the evidence seems to contradict that old tale. Having had far fewer colds, myself, than most folks I've known, I suppose I already knew that.

I must admit, however, that after such an outing, a nice hot cup of tea or coffee, or hot mulled cider, does seem to quell any tendency toward the sniffles. I learned that preventative measure from my ancient Aunt Sally, and, whether the medical-type folks determine that to be fact or fancy, I will likely insist on keeping as a part of my routine!

-36- Ode to the Clapper

Today, I feel like celebrating what I call Marginal Wonders - those things that promise something wonderful and yet turn out in some way different from that. For instance, that wonderful new shiny car that then requires weekly washing to stay that way. Those beautiful new dentures, which, though perfect, white, and even, make you look like somebody else.

Some may think of these events as disappointments, but that sets far too negative a tone. Renaming them just seems to help one smile through these ever present, ever developing, little set backs - the marginal wonders.

Ode to the Clapper

Do you recall that TV ad
About a new device -
With just two claps, that Christmas fad
Turns TVs off, so nice!

It seemed to me, convenience plus!
So purchased one, you see.
Worked like a charm - no sweat or fuss -
It set my old legs free.

I'm glad those ads are fin'lly gone
'Cause even turned down soft,
Each time that clapper ad came on,
It turned my TV off!

Ode to the Hamburger

Oh, hamburger - my life-long friend,
I have enjoyed you so!
But now, most doctor's rules I bend,
When 'cross my lips you go!

Cholesterol and fat and grease -
All bad for me they say -
And so, good friend, to keep the peace
I'll pass you by today.

(But, Pssst!! My beefy pal, lean near.
Don't fret, for I'll be back.
When others are all sleeping, here,
I'll sneak you for my snack!!!)

Roses and Noses

The roses that I brought her were
The grandest she'd e'er had.
The problem was, you see, for her,
Their pollen drove her mad!

Dark Glasses

Dark glasses for the summer's sun -
At ten, such class they'd bring!
Once on, I found they were no fun -
Too dark to see a thing!

Bubble Gum Blues

I blew the biggest bubble that
Had up to then been seen!
Just one last puff - too much - Ker-splat!
Years passed - I'm still not clean!!!

Yet somehow, we do survive these marginal wonders!

37- Family Portraits

I've been looking through the family photo albums, here of late. What a wonderful way to capture memories. Most of the pictures in my books are black and white, of course. Some of the early ones have that brown tone that was so popular for a while.

It appears that about every two or three years we'd decide we needed another family portrait. I remember all the hustle and bustle that went into getting ready for those events. On occasion, as I recall, all parties did not share equally in their enthusiasm. At any rate, there we are, preserved for posterity!

Family Portraits

The fam'ly portrait - what a deal!
A special day for all.
Designed to make each member feel
Important! Ten feet tall!

But once decision has been made
To have this picture shot,
The "Family Portrait" law's obeyed -
A strange, intriguing plot!

Dad trims his moustache, clean and neat.
Her hair, the Mother dyes.
For suits and ties the boys compete.
And, make-up, Sis applies.

It isn't often, let me add,
They're all spiffed up this way.
In Sunday-best each person clad,
The picture's snapped! Olé!!

Delivery is fin'lly there.
All gather 'round that day.
But soon, each asks, with curious stare,
"It's nice, but who are they?"

If seems that something went amiss,
I have this truth to tell:
In Fam'ly Portraits, count on this -
NO one looks like himself!!!

Through the years, my wife and I cared for lots of foster kids - some for just a few months and others for several years. So, our family portraits often included youngsters who, I must admit, don't always ring a bell right off.

Usually, with some thought, I can eventually figure out who's who, but one picture held me at bay for months. Then it struck me - it was the grocery delivery boy. One of the newer foster arrivals, caught up in the charitable inclusiveness of our home, had, on the spur of the moment, invited him to participate. It has become my very favorite family portrait! Milk or eggs, anyone?

-38- Childhood Mysteries

I treasure the moments I spend with children. - Witnessing their discoveries. - Watching them develop new skills.- Listening to how they explain and characterize their World. It's one of the happiest circumstances of childhood, I think, that there are so many unanswered questions - so many new experiences to explore - so many exciting new things to learn about. What's that? How come? Who says? (And perhaps most importantly) What if? They ask and learn. They make choices and become responsible. They think new thoughts and change mankind forever. Remember how it was?

Childhood Mysteries

Just why's the smoke from burning grass
Pure white, instead of green?
And why did Stinky Miller pass -
So big and dumb and mean!

And why did bikes stand up so well
While speeding on their way,
But once had stopped, they'd always fall
And on their side would lay?

And why did big guys always get
First chance, the bats, to wield,
While little guys like me got set
Way out in center field?

What good are bulls, I'd ask my Dad,
When they can't give us milk?
And why does God let folks be sad?
And why, so smooth, is silk?

If being fat is bad for you
Why are so many fat?
If exercise is good for you
How come Aunt May just sat?

For some of these, I've answers found,
Though hundreds still remain.
I'm grateful questions still abound!
They exercise my brain!!!

Have you ever noticed that when a question begins with the word, "how," it is immediately more productive than those beginning with, "why?" I suppose that's because a why question allows unfounded opinion in as a possible answer, while a how question usually requires facts. Compare: "Why are teens so obnoxious?" "How do teens develop their obnoxious personalities?" (Really meaning: "How does a human being's development tend to lead each one to become a bit obnoxious when a teenager?")

I love a well-formulated question. Why do you suppose - pardon me - How do you suppose I came to be that way? ! !

-39- The Stoplight Test

I understand that long ago, psychologists discovered that our basic temperament is pretty well established prior to our fourth birthday. Using many millions of research dollars, they have developed tests that determine which characteristic patterns exist within each person's personality. Good for them! I'm sure it's all quite useful and helpful as they go about assisting folks.

Long ago I discovered such a test all by myself. It cost nothing to develop. Anyone can administer it, and over the years, it's proved to be quite accurate. So, for what it may be worth to you, here it is, free of charge!

The Stoplight Test

The way a person does react
To yellow lights reveals
His basic temp'rament - 'tis fact!
Shows how with life, he deals!,

When light turns yellow, some slow down
So not to run the red.
They're careful. Make a nice safe town.
Few angry words have said.

Still others treat the yellow light
As if it still were green.
They steal that second, as in fright
Of losing out - They're mean!

Some wait quite patiently at red
For green light to appear.
Their easy going, calm, cool head
Will win respect, it's clear!

Those folks who rev their engines fast
While waiting for the greens
Just tear through life - Too soon it's past!
(It seems they're often teens!)

And those who raise their voices - mean,
At those who're slow to start,
Do sorely lack in self-esteem.
It saddens my old heart.

Now I enjoy that yellow hue.
Allows a moment's rest.
Provides me smiles as I view
Those guys who fail this test!!!

I'm sure that each of us could make up a test that would put ourselves in a good light (no pun intended), while disparaging some other group or trait. It seems to me my observations of folks over the years, has taught me that most folks truly believe that the way they are going about life is, in fact, the right way. Sadly, I think, once on that track, we seldom take time to reevaluate it and make dead certain it is actually bringing us the kind of life we (and those whose lives we touch) need.

Take the test. Be sure you're actually heading toward the goals that will allow you to leave behind the lasting image you desire.

-40- A walk on the mild side

Not long ago, my town was visited by a youth group, doing volunteer work. One of them, Bill, stayed with me for the week. I had forgotten how whirlwinds pale in comparison to the teenage constitution. It was a wonder-filled, though tiring week for me.

It is a dilemma, I suppose. In order to experience a rich and full life, should one hurry along and sample as many different experiences as possible, or should one carefully and deliberately savor each small bit that life throws your way? With the first, one misses the rich full flavor of life. With the second, one fails to discover how he fits into the larger perspective of the ages.

Bill's presence in my home that week suggested Nature's natural compromise: Sample early - savor later!

I suppose by now I should be into that savoring stage, but, gee, I do still love those samples!

A walk on the mild side

When younger, every day I'd jog -
Ten miles, often more.
I sped along in runner's tog.
(Made feet and limbs so sore!)

Some years ago I slowed it down.
Still walk, though, every day.
Exploring every street in town.
Make friends along the way.

When jog was done, I'd be so glad,
And dread the next repeat!
When walk's now through, I feel I've had
Adventures - Oh, so neat!!

I read that walking's just as good!
No need to go so fast!
How much I missed when thought I should
Rush on, in those times past.

We should, 'bout middle-age, I'd say,
Review where haste has led.
From there, this road sign, though, obey -
"Reduce your speed ahead!"

Perhaps Mother Nature, in her infinite wisdom, takes care of all this for us, automatically. I realize my sampling often extends itself into unintended savoring these days, primarily because I'm just too tired to move on. Probably not a bad plan. So take heart. Being just too pooped to pop, may well be part of the grand scheme of things!

-41- Newfangled Gadgets

On one occasion, just after having had his home electrified,
my Grampa sent a letter to the light company complaining that
he needed a handle for his light bulb - it kept burning his
hands as he moved it from room to room in the evening.
Those dad-gummed newfangled gadgets! Oh, Grampa, Dear
Grampa, how I can sympathize with you now!

Newfangled Gadgets

No sooner had I mastered my
New toaster-oven than,
The microwave arrived, and I
Was mystified again.

My Kodak Hawkeye worked just fine
But then one Christmas day,
I found a Polaroid was mine.
(Two "Hips". One small "Hooray")

It used to be so simple back
When movie night rolled 'round.
I'd buy a ticket, then a sack
Of corn, and settle down.

But now it seems to be the rage
To go out in the car,
And rent a tape, come home and wage
Fierce war with VCR!

The new car test-drive would be free.
How grand those plush seats felt!
I turned the key. It yelled at me,
"Please fasten your seat belt!"

I went into a music store
And asked for an LP.
The clerk snapped, "They're not made no more."
(Well, please, son, pardon me!)

I'm not against new ways, my friend!
The thing I just can't bear,
Is how, each month, I now must send
My ego for repair.

I've waited as long as I could, but, anyway, this seems like
a most appropriate place to insert a brief summary of one of
my most treasured personal, head to head, match-ups with
today's technology and the younger generation.

Sometimes I Feel S-o-o-o Dumb!

I took new VCR from box.
It sat and flashed at me.
So had a friend come set the clock.
Embarrassed!! He's just three!!!!

(Well, sometimes I do exaggerate just a bit, but the more
accurate, "He's just five," didn't rhyme with "me." Either way,
it makes me feel s-o-o-o dumb!)

-42- Puppy Cute

Webster's Dictionary provides two definitions for cute. The first is: "attractive; pretty." The second: "clever, shrewd." When using the term cute to describe brand new little animals, I believe both meanings must be intended. Brand new babies, - crying, wrinkled, bald, blind - are hardly what I'd call pretty or attractive. My, though, how they cleverly work their way into one's heart with nudges, licks, whimpers, and nestling up just right, against your body. I doubt, of course, if any of that is an intended shrewdness, but old Mother Nature sure has a way of providing, doesn't she!

Puppy Cute

There are new puppies on my walk,
So very cute and small.
Each morning as I pass, we talk
'Bout weather, life and all.

The one is brown, the other white.
Such energy they show!
They lick and nuzzle - never fight.
Just loving ways they know.

Reminds me of my childhood days.
Few fears or thoughts of harm.
Just wondrous days, all filled with play.
At night, Mom's loving arms.

There's nothing like a puppy's "cute."
Exuberance abounds!
Decked out in fluffy, soft new suit.
Their high-pitched yelping sounds.

Today, to them, I told this rule:
"Your 'cute' won't always be,
In fact, it won't be long 'til you'll
Look old and plain like me!"

"But that's OK. Don't fret, young pals,
'Cause when you're old and weak,
You'll know, when winks you get from gals,
It's you, not looks, they seek!"

Newborn anythings just seem to overflow with cute, don't they. Perhaps it is their need for us that helps make them all so appealing. We humans do seem to have an inborn need to take care of that which can't do it for itself. I suppose that single, remarkable, trait sets us apart from all other beings in the known universe, doesn't it.

And yet, somewhere along the way, certain of our kind, seem to lose, or at least misplace that precious property. That seems so very sad. Happily for most of us, if we have strayed somewhere along the line, we find ourselves returning to our nurturing ways during our senior years. (Some of us - or so I have been told - even regain a bit of cute ourselves! My face is red for having said that, but at my age, I'll gladly flaunt anything that works!)

-43- One vice is all I ask

You know, folks, I truly have tried to live a good life. I've kept myself relatively free from those personal vices about which I was warned as a child. For more years than we will count here, I've pretty well trod the straight and narrow. But now, after all that, I'd think I could be allowed just one tiny, little, infinitesimal vice, wouldn't you!

One vice is all I ask

I s'pose that if I have one vice
It's eating way too much!
I love eclairs and pie - sooo nice -
Large sundaes, cones and such.

It's also hard to pass up chips
And fries and burgers, too,
And then those guacamole dips
And tacos (six will do!).

Would you believe that I've been known
A quart of milk to drink,
While eating doughnuts - twelve, alone -
And do it in a wink!

Now, I don't smoke, nor do I touch
The alcoholic brew.
I exercise - like, walk and such.
Monogamous (It's true!!)

I ne'er (well, seldom!) curse or swear,
Or put another down.
Don't rumors spread or gossip bear,
I smile - rarely frown.

Doc says, must change my eating ways
Or early grave I'll take.
Not fair, the terrible fate, I say,
That one small vice can make.

Perhaps, I'll launch a vice-filled fling!
All sorts of sins include!!
Then blame my end on many things
Instead of just good food!!!!

Actually, I'm not yet a blimp, nor anything near that state, but I do enjoy all the wrong foods. Physical anthropologists tell us that's because in our cave man days, the necessary small amounts of fats and salt were hard to come by - unlike berries and veggies - so those who survived were those who had an inborn craving for meat and saline. Now, when, those things are no longer difficult to find - and in fact are about all that is available at many fast food places - we continue to crave them all out of proportion to our actual needs. Survival not having been dependant upon an inborn appetite for the more plentiful, healthful things, few of us seem to seek out the fruits, nuts, cereals and berries that we need.

I'm truly glad my hairy ancestors were driven to find enough fat to survive, so I can be here today. I just wish that outdated craving would somehow subside. Fat chance!

-44- Electricity, Elves and Love

As a youngster I found it so difficult to believe in things I couldn't hold or see or touch or heft. If they didn't occupy my space, they just didn't seem real. Happily, because of that, I never spent much time worrying about the bogeyman, ghosts, and the like. On the other hand, I never really delighted in some of the nicer childhood fantasies, like fairies, elves, and magic.

In school, I always pushed my teachers for concrete examples of concepts such as truth and justice, and would demand incontrovertible proof to support their ideas of right and wrong.

I've mellowed since then, mostly thanks to the patient influence of Ginny, my dear, late wife.

Electricity, Elves and Love.

When young, I found it very hard
To trust what could not touch.
I seemed to always be on guard
For proof (not some but MUCH!).

Now, electricity, they say
Has ne'er been seen.- it's true!
And yet, when turn it on each day -
Does wondrous things for you.

It lights the lamps. The stove it heats.
Runs TVs night and day.
It truly does so many feats-
Still, should be seen, I'd say!

Guess, electricity is one
Fantastic mystery,
Dependably, its job gets done
All quite invisibly!!

Today, when 'tricity I doubt,
I think of Ginny, Dear,
And of the love she spread about,
Unseen, yet still, it's here!

Would seem compassion, love and cheer,
Are unseen forces, yet,
Like electricity they're here!
Good friends, though never met!!

Enough said, I think!

-45- Good news! Bad news!

Some days it's easier to smile than on others. I'm afraid this is one of those others.

I made the mistake of watching the late news last night. How Depressing! How does one manage a refreshing night's sleep after ending their day with the news? I usually watch at six. That way I have the whole evening to cheer myself up again - to tell myself there really is still good out there somewhere. Sorry folks, but if you're already feeling blue today, you'd probably do better by putting this down now, and coming back to it when you're overly perky, and need a good downer.

Good news! Bad news!

Most evening newscasts get me down -
So filled with all that's bad.
What's bright, like teachers, nurse, and clown,
Are seldom to be had.

Some say we like our own lives more
When witness other's strife,
As shown, each night, on channel four -
The newscast side of life.

But makes me sick, there is no doubt,
To watch my World decay.
To see the haters all about -
Watch kids get shot at play.

I guess, I watch the news each night
In hope this is the one
In which I'll hear we're doing right -
That love and peace have won.

Each night, the news, I must admit,
Inspires me anew
Next day to challenge my old wit
And bring a grin to you.

Know, (as I praise cholesterol,
Poke fun at you and me),
My goal's to show us, one and all,
How grand this life can be!!

There's lots of good news on my street this evening -
children out riding bikes, teens strolling along hand in hand,
young fathers washing their cars, older folks sitting on their
porch swings, twelve year olds pushing lawn mowers, and the
sound of the brand new baby's cry next door. Best of all,
perhaps, are the sounds of neighbors talking together happily.
If everyone in the World could just talk happily with the
neighbors on each side of them, there would be no place for
hate or harm, or fear. Would there?

-46- Shaving Arithmetic

It's interesting, all the things we do just automatically every day. Get up. Shower. Brush our teeth. Eat breakfast. Take a walk. Go to bed. There are dozens of other, individual things we each have slipped into our own routines over the years. We seldom even think about them. I suppose that saves vital brain power for those things we really need to ponder each day.

It's probably no surprise to you, that I enjoy dissecting those regular habits - Are they really necessary? Could we become more efficient? What if we just stopped doing them? This morning I was contemplating the act of shaving!

Shaving Arithmetic

Each morning as I shave my face,
I pause and wonder, there,
How many miles I have chased
That pesky facial hair!

I figure, 'bout a six inch stroke
With every shaving slide.
And sixty strokes, I do invoke,
Each shave, I did decide.

That's thirty feet each day, complete!
Times seven days a week,
Which comes to o're two-hundred feet
Each week I shave my cheeks.

Two miles a year with shaver go!
No wonder face looks warn!!
A lot of work it seems, just so
My chin, hair, won't adorn!

For several years, a moustache I
Have nurtured on my lip.
Few strokes it saves as weeks slip by,
But, GEE, I look *so* hip!

The image of a beard now hounds -
I'd look so suave and wise!
Each year, would prob'ly gain ten pounds
From missed shave exercise!!!

When I was a young man, in an attempt to look older, I grew a beard. My hair was red, my eyebrows auburn, my moustache brown, and my beard came in black as coal. Since that rainbow arrangement of facial hair never caught on, I soon dispensed with the beard. I did save the eyebrows and so far Mother Nature has been kind in leaving most of the hair on top of my head. Long since gray, it is still there, if atop a somewhat larger forehead. For years I've been fully prepared for the Yul Brenner look, and in some ways feel deprived that it didn't arrive for me. Perhaps during my second hundred that will come to pass!

-47- Senior Coffee

Some of life's most humorous and enjoyable moments can only take place after we have reached our senior years. As you know, I delight in recording them and passing them on to you.

It seems a shame that so many older folks just can't see the humor in all of this!. They seem to take them as personal put-downs. Eleanor Roosevelt once said something to the effect that, "No one can put you down unless you are willing to accept it as a put down."

As you might guess, I smile politely and then refuse!

Senior Coffee

There is a place I eat each day
Where pancakes are delish!
The gals who wait are great, I'd say.
They tend to every wish!

They have a "Senior Coffee" deal
For older folks, like me,
And with your purchase of a meal,
You get your coffee free.

Sometimes, new waitresses will charge
Me menu's sixty cents.
I pay, and take it as a large
And wondrous compliment!!

A Special Haircut

The Father of a neighbor lad
Related this to me:
John's last trip to the barber had
Produced a problem, see:

John asked the barber, "Please, will you
Cut mine like Grampa Gray's."
The barber somehow failed, much to
Young Johnny's great dismay!

The barber asked, "What's wrong, Big Guy?"
"I want," John snapped that day,
"A lot of skin above my eyes
And hair that's wavy gray!!!"

Skate Boarding - Senior Style

At 58, it wasn't smart,
But skate board looked like fun.
I got off to a fine, smooth start
And thought the deed was done!

But then, in front, a curb appeared!
I panicked, must admit!
I swiveled hips and smoothly veered
Right into Widow Pitt.

In one way, wasn't bad, you see,
In fact, it turned out great!
When I get out of traction, she's
Agreed to have a date!

My Grampa enjoyed watching people make fools of themselves. He'd say, "I sure hope other folks enjoy watching the dumb stuff I do, as much as I enjoy watching the dumb stuff they do!" As a child, that seemed fair.

Now, however, I suppose, that for myself, I would have to paraphrase Grampa's maxim. "I sure hope other people enjoy the dumb stuff they do, as much as I enjoy the dumb stuff I do."

A sad life awaits the individual who hasn't learned to laugh at himself and enjoy the fun-filled foibles of his life!

-48- Legacy

A philosophic rush has burst upon me this morning. I've been wondering, after all is said and done, just what I will have left behind? I don't mean petty things like furniture, rings, and bank accounts. But what legacy, what message about life and living, about love and caring, will I have etched in some obvious and meaningful way? Oh, I'm not looking to have changed the World - but do hope somehow to have improved the lot of those who have come within my reach. Furniture, rings and bank accounts! They just don't mean much to the ages, do they?

Legacy

A lofty Oak lived on my street -
It stood a hundred years!
Five generations it would greet.
Surveying joy and tears.

A climbing tree for lads of eight,
A kissing tree for teens,
A wondrous sight for me - That Great
Bouquet of limbs and greens.

When Spring unfolded, green and bright,
This year, that treasured tree,
No leaves would sprout. A sad, sad sight,
For lads and teens and me.

With axe and saw the trimmers came
And took away our friend.
And though the street can't look the same
It's presence does not end.

Its huge round stump one cannot miss.
Lads climb it, with delight!
And still, I see young lovers kiss
While sitting there, each night.

I hope that when I've gone away,
I'll leave a memory
Which lingers on through love and play
As did that Grand Oak Tree!

-49- The Dances of Our Lives

I'm fascinated by the rituals of life; of one's culture, really, I suppose. We learn them well and we succeed. We fail to learn them and we falter or fail. We learn to play ball or to sew or cook. We learn to date and eventually marry. As our parents before us, we have, and raise a family. We gladly work to support and care for them. For some, then, comes retirement - for others, at least, a somewhat slower pace. Perhaps grandparenthood arrives! As oldsters, we are often both revered and yet play the role of cultural curiosities.

The rituals of life - Like dances played out across the time and space of our days.

The Dances of Our Lives

When small, I loved to dance with Mom.
She'd go where e'er I'd lead!
For sure, my moves were never calm!
The dance, my spirit, freed!

At birthday party - nine years old -
A girl asked me to dance.
No way a silly girl, I'd hold!
I ran away, first chance!!

At thirteen, was all legs and arms,
Though dancing did enjoy.
Each girl I'd hold, I'd somehow harm!
Was called "The lead foot boy!"

By sixteen, dancing was my life!
It made me feel so great!
Alleviated teen-day strife -
Just loved a dancing date!

My wife and I danced every night,
There in our cozy place.
We'd twirl and dip, first left then right.
The years, ne'er slowed our pace!

Last week, at mixer - young and old -
Seems something went amiss!
"You slow dance well, Sir," I was told.
(But I'd just done the twist!)

I've grown to believe that one of the other rituals of our lives,
is the way we learn to eat - what we learn to like - to crave,
even. I have determined through personal experience that as
one grows older, it is less than easy to modify that early
acquired pattern.

Peach Pie!

If I should live to ninety nine
(As, these days, easy could!)
I hope the things on which I dine
Will still taste pretty good.

I'll give up chips and salt and fries.
I'll give up pickles, dill.
But, Oh, I hope those grand peach pies
Will grace my menus, still!

If we are what we eat, it is quite likely that in my next life I
will return as a peach pie (golden brown, double crust - top
one woven - just screaming out for a big slab of vanilla ice
cream).

-50- The Bottomless Pit!!

Each year, on my birthday, I routinely go through my wallet and remove things that I no longer need to carry. This year I found business cards from salesmen I hope to never see again, receipts for a rented rug shampoo machine, a spare key to who knows what, a chewing gum wrapper, a lottery ticket (hope it wasn't a winner), numerous scraps of paper containing my totally unintelligible scribbles, a library card from Bora Bora (don't even ask!), two rubber bands and a paper clip.

A guy's wallet, you see, contains things that once really were important, unlike a gal's purse, which completely prepares her for next year and beyond!

The Bottomless Pit!!

The purse, a bottomless device,
Designed so women could
Mysteriously carry twice
As much as sane folks should!

A little purse? There's no such thing!
The outside may look small
Inside? A circus tent - three ring!
Trapeze, clowns, seal on ball!!

In purse, a woman has the knack
Of packing years ahead,
She carries breath mints by the pack
And make-up - green to red!!

With notebooks, pens and hairpins, too
And hankies, scarfs and hose,
A toothbrush, borrowed books - past due -,
And Kleenex for the nose.

There's catsup, pepper, salt and cloves,
And sugar substitute,
There's pumpernickel (little loaves!),
A teddy bear. A flute!

This proof of size I'll add, then go,
As end this "Huge Purse" verse.
I once got lost from wife, you know -
She found me in her purse!!!!

It is one of the great enigmas of life. Little girls never seem to carry anything around with them. Little boys have pockets filled to overflowing with stones and toads and tree-bark - treasures of all sorts. I once even found a live perch in my son's coveralls. But once a teen, it all reverses. Do you suppose that hormones could really be responsible? (I think it's probably her-moans.)

-51- Lookin' Great!

Have you noticed that exactly the same phrase can mean quite different things on different occasions, or when said to, or by, different people? "How interesting!" "Is that so?" "That's really hard to believe!" "I'd love to, but..." "If only I had known," "Your hat? - truly unique, I'd say." Well, I'm sure you get the drift of what I'm thinking, here.

It seems to me that I may now interpret some of those phrases differently than I did back in my younger, more vigorous years. It's fun to pull the leg of those who spew those, less than sincere, platitudes.

Lookin' Great!

You're really lookin' great, my friend,
We say to babies new,
And mean they're cute from end to end,
As slobber there on you!

You're really lookin' great, my friend,
To ten year old we say,
As o'er the fence that ball he sends,
And wins the game that day.

You're really lookin' great, my friend,
We say to scout at door,
As in her uniform she vends
Those cookies - "Please buy more!"

You're really lookin' great, my friend,
On prom night, couple's told.
We snap their picture, then we send
Them off to "boogy bold!"

You're really lookin' great, my friend,
We tell new bride and mate,
No need on that day to pretend,
Their beauty radiates!

You're really lookin' great, my friend,
Folks say to me today.
"Well thanks! Sure hope so," I contend,
"Took years to get this way!!!"

And then there was . . .

The Highest Compliment

Each day a little boy stops by
And spends some time with me.
We have a talk, just guy to guy -
He tells me he is three.

I hear about his Mom and Dad -
That he stayed dry last night -
And how his brother gets real mad
And sometimes starts a fight.

He likes to hear my timeworn tales
Of when I was a boy.
My time with him just never fails
To fill my life with joy!

One day he drew ME with a crayon
And said, when he was through,
"I hope when I'M an old, OLD man,
I'll be as young as you!!!"

Need I say more?

-52- Blessings In Disguise

Things work out so well sometimes. Don't they? Just when we think we're about to be counted out, things change and, there we are, at the top of the heap again. And often, when something has taken place, which we know is bound to ruin our life forever, we discover, later on, that it was really for the best, after all.

I suppose the mere possibility of turning these dire, dreaded, consequences into positive lessons and joys, is one of the most hopeful parts of living. No matter how bad something seems today, there is always that chance that somehow, sometime, we will understand how it has all been for the best.

Blessings In Disguise

The pain in baby's tummy, new,
Produces red-faced cries.
That way, though, Mom knows milk is due -
Cries? Blessings in Disguise.

From fears of that first day at school -
That break with apron ties -
Grows confidence in self - a jewel!
Fears? Blessings in disguise!

The teen who frets about first kiss
And fumbles as he tries,
Finds date is even worse at this!
Frets? Blessings in disguise!

Young marrieds struggle as they learn
To cope and compromise,
And then, one day, grand love, discern.
Stress? Blessings in disguise!

The kids leave home to make their way.
Soon grandkids do arrive.

Retirement means time to play.
Change? Blessings in disguise.

Now aging slows us from a run .
A pain (or ten) arrives -
But now have time for love and fun -
Years? Blessings in disguise!

And every once in a while, we oldsters get one last chance
to momentarily relive some wonder-filled time of our youth!

Hormones Revisited

Some time ago, I went to work
Down at a Dairy Queen.
And I became a soda jerk -
The oldest ever seen!

I worked with guys - most in their teens -
They shared about their dates,
Would point out girls in skin-tight jeans -
Strange feelings would create!

Perplexed! Seemed back there at that stage
Where young things turned my head.
I think I've traced it to contag-
'Ous hormones teen-boys spread!

Although those feelings had been swell,
"Twas good they did recant,
"Cause if they'd not, I'm here to tell,
I'd need a heart transplant!

-53- "Coffee-Light"

[written back before the advent of 'Lite' coffees]

I've noticed that when I really want or like something which I know I shouldn't have, my mind has a most convenient way of truly forgetting - at least momentarily - why it's off limits. Peach pie ala mode ("Just a few extra calories that I can work off" - forgetting the saturated fats and cholesterol). A bowl - dish pan size - of popcorn ("The roughage will be good for me" - forgetting the butter and the salt).

You get the idea. I've decided my subconscious mind spends many hours each day just maintaining these kinds of fantasies for me. Just think what I might accomplish if I could harness all that mental energy for "good!" (Think of all the fun I'd miss!!)

Coffee-Light"

Although some say it isn't true,
Decaf seems bland - a tease!
And though it may be best for you,
Make mine, the real kind, please!

A shot of caffeine to my brain
Just fills my soul with pep!
(On days I settle for the "plain,"
I feel quite out of step.)

I've come upon a compromise
That lessens guilt, each day.
Now, not to brag, but feel quite wise -
It comes about this way.

From jar, with decaf, I begin.
Fill cup, half water - hot.
Then pour some home brewed "real stuff" in,
Re-caffeinated, got!!!

It really tastes quite fine, I think,
This half and half, to me!
At ten watch news, and never blink!
No naps, I need, you see!

What's that, my friend? Did you say that
You, too, brew "coffee-light?"
Please, tell me then, how do you get
Yourself to sleep at night????

Sometimes that subconscious mind can get you into big
trouble - especially when it is cranking out those unrealistic
expectations.

Grow Up!

One day I'd had it with my son!
I flew into a rage!
"Seems all you ever want is fun -
Grow up and act your age!"

"Life's tough out there, son, don't you see?
Where is your spunk and drive?"
He had the nerve to say to me,
"But Dad, I'm only five!"

I truly am a great believer in the power that the
subconscious mind has on us, and I work hard each day to
make it work in positive ways for me. My alter ego has even
researched and written books about it -(Nowhere near as much
fun as writing silly verse, however!).

-54- The Wash Cycle

One of the more interesting aspects of growing older is the historical perspective one can provide for important, emerging trends. "How was it way back when you were little?" is the most frequent question I receive when I visit elementary classrooms. I'm always happy to oblige with a story (or ten!).

There are so many major areas of important trends to track; Politics, medicine, the arts, Elizabeth Taylor's husbands (Sorry about that! Please note, Mama, that I did slap my own face!).

In addition to those, however, there are a multitude of less well publicized, though equally as important, streams of development.

The Wash Cycle

When young, at home, so poor were we
That had no wash machine.
We washed things out by hand, you see,
'Twas great - that hand-washed clean!

Then came the new, hand-powered kind.
I'd turn that handle long.
I didn't mind. While was a grind,
It also made me strong!

That one was followed by the type
With engine - gasoline,
And soon electric - I'd not gripe -
Their work? The best I'd seen!

Then automatics came to be.
They washed without much aid.
Though seemed a miracle to see,
Were boring, I'm afraid.

Soon dryers came along, and we
No longer hung things out.
You'd think, then, we'd have time for tea -
Not so! Still buzzed about!

A bach'lor once again, am I,
With socks and shirts replete.
Again, I am a hand-wash guy,
The cycle is complete!!!

And then there are those things, which when younger we
are certain will become welcome "trends," but that somehow
turn out a bit differently from how we had it all planned.

Oh, To Stay Up Late!

When I was still a little guy,
I just could hardly wait
'Til I would grow so big that I
Could stay up very late.

But by the time I got that age,
I worked so hard all day,
I'd get as far as that front page,
Then have to hit the hay!

Hot and Sultry

When young, those hot and sultry girls
Commanded every glance.
I panted at their lips and curls,
And wondered 'bout my chance!

When "hot and sultry," now, I think,
It's not on girls I gaze,
But at my tall, cold lemon drink
On humid summer days!!

55- Sprinkles Of Wrinkles

Recently, I was asked why I spend so much time, here, talking about growing old. The question delights me. It involves two things my favorite teacher always stressed.

First, the word "talking." She taught me that informal writing should always appear to be a one-on-one conversation. So, "talking" pleases me. Then, she'd say: "Write about what is familiar to you." Believe me, folks, growing older is familiar! I do try to put a positive spin on it. Hope that comes through.

Today's endeavor is multiple choice. I hope one of the poems fits your feelings on the subject of the day.

Sprinkles Of Wrinkles

Those wrinkles - are they friends or foes?

On men, distinguished, seem!

But women tell me, they're a blow

That lowers self-esteem.

It's time we get this wrinkle thing

In proper focus, folks.

Let's put our heads together, bring

Wise thoughts, and smarts invoke.

Perhaps they are a badge we wear

To tell the World we're wise.

Perhaps a trophy, won through care

And love - a wondrous prize!

Perhaps each wrinkle on our face

Reflects a selfless deed.

I think of them as Nature's lace -

One's inner beauty freed!

Since Mother Nature spent, you see,
A lifetime to design
This special, wrinkled face for me,
I'm proud of it! It's mine!!

An Interesting "New Wrinkle"

That term, "new wrinkle," which refers
To grand ideas - new,
I'm sure 'twas coined (just now occurs),
By some young, smooth-faced shrew!

As I said, it's multiple choice. I must admit that I am intrigued by all the money people spend trying to appear younger than they really are. It is as if there is something dirty or unseemly about letting nature take its course. It has also occurred to me that if those of us in our "golden" years, would stop spending that billion dollars a year on the wrinkle creams, hair coloring, and so on, our economy just might collapse. So, if you find yourself needing to put on that false mask of youth each morning, you can perhaps justify it in terms of just doing your little bit to save the world's economy! (Of course, just think what that billion dollars could do to feed the hungry - a genuine, unnecessary, catastrophe of nature.)

-56- Child-Proof Containers!!!

Sometimes I sit back and wonder if my government has invaded all too many aspects of my life and my privacy. They know how much I have in the bank, how much I give to which charities, how old I am, the state of my health, my political affiliation, and on and on and on!

But then, it also protects me from tainted food, dangerous water, foreign invaders, the bad guys down the street, deceptive practices, and even from accidental overdoses of dangerous medicine.

I'm not real sure if that last thing, I appreciate as I should.

Child-Proof Containers!!!

Most days, a bright-eyed four year old
Will come and visit me.
"I'm smarter now," I'm usually told,
"Than back when I was three!"

He proved that very thing to me
The day, my pills, he saw,
And opened them quick as could be.
Were packaged, as per law!

"A child-proof container," read
The label. (Let's all scoff!)
I think "Old-man-proof" should have said.
Can never get it off!

I fight that stubborn lid when need
To take my pill, each day.
I yell, I shout, I jeer, I plead!
Once off, it stays that way!!

That kid can open anything!
Does pickle jars for fun!
Henceforth, you bet, to him I'll bring
Containers - every one!!

One box, though, stumped both me and him.
We tugged and pulled and rapped!
The villain? Pills or cleaners - grim?
No! Raisins, plastic wrapped!!!

And then sometimes, it is what the government thinks it knows that causes problems. Years ago I received a letter from the social security office informing me that they would no longer be able to accept my quarterly payments because their records showed I was dead. (Why they would be writing to me if they thought I was dead, they never made clear!)

I called them, assuring them that I had not yet passed on, but the young lady on the other end insisted that yes, her records indicated that I was quite dead. I would have to come down to the office with irrefutable evidence. "And what would be considered irrefutable," I asked. Fingerprints matching law enforcement records (I had never had reason to be fingerprinted - something I had thought was good.). My mother's face to face sworn testimony (Of course she had died forty years before.) Sworn testimony from the embalmer that I was not the one he had embalmed (of course I had no way of knowing who that might be.) It got even more comical.

"How about if I just come in and apply for a new number," I asked. There was a long pause as she conferred with her supervisor. Presently she said, "I can do that if you are really alive. Just bring your birth certificate and some picture ID." Evidently when I showed up at the office, I appeared to be sufficiently alive, for I was soon sporting a brand new number. (Later on we did get it all straightened out, in case you're concerned about my lost benefits.)

Every once in a while, I have to wonder if there just might have been some benefits in remaining "dead."

57- The Attic Fanatic

Isn't it amazing the things we keep? We fill our closets, basements, garages, car trunks, spare rooms, attics and, I suppose, any other available space. Perhaps I am more of a pack rat than most, but one just never knows when you might really need empty milk cartons, pickle jars, broken sofas, old hubcaps and, well, you get the picture.

It seems that each Spring it's time for me to go through the motions and pretend to clean out all those places. Basements, garages and closets are no fun. You never store the really good stuff there. That's all saved for the wonder-filled attic!

The Attic Fanatic (that's me)

The attic is my fav'rite place,
Though reeks of dust and must,
Old dreams are stored for us to chase,
And mem'ries we can trust.

A place old frames are quite content,
Where chairs and books reside.
Where posters 'gainst the wall stand - bent,
Lace dress from lovely bride.

Two dozen boxes each are marked
As things they don't contain,
And over in the corner, parked,
The kiddy-car and train.

Those things there, filling every nook
All help me to relive
Days past, as take just one more look -
Such happiness they give.

The things, there stored, so pleased, all seem,
To be among their friends.
As if each day they live my dreams.
My past, that attic tends!

When finished, is my Worldly chat,
And with the angels fly,
My pref'rence is to go to that
Big Attic in the sky!

I have been traveling around the country these past few years, living in many different communities for short periods of time, getting to know the real Americans in the rural mid-west. It wasn't possible to bring my attic along - well, not in person, anyway.

I can still remember that attic in its every detail, however, and often spend evenings looking it over again in my minds eye. It has made me come to realize that in so many ways, our memory is the attic our being. Long live our attics!!!

-58- Dreams

A six year old told me he had it all figured out -
"Dreams," he said, "Are God's way of entertaining you while
you're asleep." I suppose that theory is about as well founded
as any other.

As I was growing up it seemed that the adults around
me were always accusing me of whiling away my time by day
dreaming. They were right, of course! I still like to day
dream. After all, if it weren't for my unique brand of day
dreams, none of this silliness would ever make it's way onto
paper. (Some, whom I've met -college journalism professors
in particular - just might question the usefulness of those day
dreams J.)

I enjoy daydreams because I am, more or less, in control
of them. I enjoy night dreams because I'm not!

Dreams

We're all aware that dreams are strange
Fantastic fancy flights!
From fun to fear to future, range.
Sometimes, they're brand new sights!

When young, I'd dream of growing up,
Becoming strong and tall.
I'd dream of caring for my pup,
Dependent, fragile, small.

My teen-age dreams were really fine -
Though shan't detail them, we
Could say they crossed that mystic line
From play to ecstasy!!!

Sometimes I dream, now, of my son.
Grew up and brought such joy!
Still, as my sleep-time pictures run,
I see my baby boy.

I seem to dream a lot these days
With many memories
To occupy my nightly gaze -
Some please while others tease!

I hope your dreams bring grins and joy
And memories galore!
Perhaps a place, a time, a toy,
The person you adore.

I wish you only pleasant dreams
Of rainbow colors bright,
Of Spring, and sunshine's golden beams.
To make your World feel right!

I have one fav'rite dream some nights -
Returns to please my head!
'Tis not of beauty, wealth or might,
But smelling, fresh baked bread!

Actually, I do have a recurring dream. It's fantastic while I'm sleeping, but once I awaken ... well ... the dream is of a World in which every last person has a million reasons to smile.

-59- Beautiful Books

A very wise teacher once cautioned me never to assume that what I meant by a given word, would, in fact, be the exact, same thing another person meant by that very same word. We each have just slightly differing definitions that may, on occasion, make communication challenging, if not impossible.

A case in point!

Beautiful Books

I've always treasured books, my friend,
So, when I had a son,
That same esteem I tried to send
To him, and thought it done.

I taught him books were beautiful.
His books he did adore!
So why then, did this prank, he pull,
That day when he was four?

'Twas Father's Day, I do recall.
I sat to read my book.
I found all pages, crayon-adorned.
Had son's artistic look.

What could have prompted this display?
Perhaps some unmet need?
It must have taken half a day
To do this terrible deed!

I called him in! He had that look -
Expectancy, full blown!
"We need to talk about this book,"
I said, in solemn tone.

He climbed up in my lap, just full
Of smiles, then did say,
"I tried to make it beautiful
For you on Father's Day!!!"

He kissed my cheek and hugged me tight!
"D'you like my present, Dad?"
"It's Great! The colors are so bright!
Such beauty! Thank you, lad!

I remember that my eyes became moist. Perhaps that was
from the circulation blocking hug or the fine, freshly tousled
hair in my face. None of those things, however, explain the
moist eyes just now!

-60- First Dates

Relationships! Sometimes the bane of one's existence.
Sometimes the spice of life. Always instruments of change.

It seems to me that we just gradually and comfortably
grow into the majority of our relationships. We chat, casually,
at first, and each person makes judgments about whether or
not to pursue a closer friendship. We can just be ourselves.
No need to sell anything. No feelings of rejection if every
acquaintance doesn't become a good friend.

But then there are dates! Just be yourself? No feelings
of rejection? Get serious!

First Dates

Now, first dates can be tragedies!
And mine was nothing less-
I stomped her toes and spilled her tea,
Then, fell and tore her dress!!!

"Embarrassed" hardly fits the state
I was to feel that night!
Dad helped by saying all first dates
Were merely practice flights!

More "practice flights" were to be had!
I'd not give up on this!!
And soon, to date was not half bad!!!
I'd usually get a kiss!!!!

I guess there's no way to evade
That first date - It must come!
When my son had his first - nerves frayed!
It left ME limp and numb!!

I had a date three nights ago -
In forty years, my first!
I spilled her tea, and stomped her toes.
As Date, I was the worst!

But this time didn't panic, for
I've learned to trust in life.
That first young girl whose dress I tore?
For thirty years my wife!!

Only recently have I learned that there's a difference between being alone and being lonely - the first need not bring on the second. In fact, there is something to be said for being able to appreciate solitude. I guess in some ways I have the best of both Worlds. I can go to work and be with my young associates during the day and truly enjoy their companionship. Then, at night, I can return home and appreciate the quiet restfulness of being alone. In neither situation need I feel lonely. My time at work is invigorating and I need that. My time at home is refreshing, and I need that as well.

(This dating thing, though, seems to be messing up my routine, but then, I've always enjoyed a good mess!!)

-61- It's Hard To Plan, You Know?

Most of my life I have needed to be pretty well organized. I've kept calendars, lists, and appointment books. It's nice that things are now beginning to calm down, so most of that is no longer needed. (Well, truthfully, I must admit that if it weren't for my lists these days, I'd undoubtedly forget even such routine things as buttoning my fly, but that will be a topic for another day!)

Looking back, now, it seems that certain eras in my life were way over-planned. The interesting thing is that so often what was planned, and what really happened, just didn't coincide!!

It's Hard To Plan, You Know?

At five, I loved to build with tools -
Would be a building pro.
At six, they dragged me off to school -
It's hard to plan, you know?

At twelve I knew girls were a pest.
But hormones then would flow.
By thirteen, loved them, must confess -
It's hard to plan, you know?

At twenty, loved my bachelor life -
On girls my pay I'd blow.
But, enter Ginny! Soon my wife -
It's hard to plan, you know?

We'd have six kids (or maybe eight)!
We'd help them learn and grow.
To have just one became our fate -
It's hard to plan, you know?

I never dreamed I'd live this long.
Still fit from head to toe!
I can't imagine what went "wrong" -

It's hard to plan, you know?

There is this rule of life - quite grand:
As down life's path we go,
The best that comes, is seldom planned -
Enjoy what comes, you know?

I've come to the conclusion that the unexpected is the spice of life. Oh, I still make plans, but these days, I'm tickled pink to have to change them. I hope you, too, can welcome and appreciate the unexpected. Since such things are going to happen regardless, one might as well embrace them!

I was on my way to the store for milk last evening when I came across a five-year old lad looking for his lost quarter. I stopped to help. In the process we discovered a praying mantis, a half dozen beautiful rocks that just had to be pocketed to show his mother, and we both made a new friend. The quarter? Would you believe he found one right there under a big green leaf. He concluded that his eyes were sharper than mine, since I had just been looking there myself.

Ah! The unexpected! (And cheerios without milk for breakfast this morning really weren't all that bad!)

-62- Love Thyself First

There is this older person in my neighborhood who is always and forever doing "nice" things for me. They are not only unnecessary, but often downright irritating. For a long time I told myself, "She means well, so don't get upset." But then I figured out what she was up to. She was making me indebted to her, so I would have to think highly of her - like her, love her, whatever. Since she can't really love herself, she tries to force the rest of us to prove to her, with our thanks and gratitude, that she is, in fact, lovable. Poor thing is trying to "buy" our attention and affection!

Thanks for letting me get that off my chest! I do feel better!!

Love Thyself First

It's hard to love another, 'til
You love yourself, it's true.
So first, you have to say you will
Accept this guy that's you.

Accept what's good and not so good!
Can change some if you want.
To start all this, I think we should
Be fair, but down right blunt!

Like, I'm impatient, but I try!
I love to sit and rock!
In truth, must say, that sometimes I
Love gossip from my block!

I'm not too thrilled about gray hair
Or wrinkles on my face,
But in an effort to be fair,
With you, I'd not change place!

I'm sure not perfect! Goodness Sake!
(And don't intend to be!)
Perfection, all the fun would take
Away from life for me!

Self-Loving Skill, I think I've earned
'Cause now it's clear that my
Three finest friends, I've come to learn
Are me, myself, and I!!!

I suppose I am lucky, since early in life, I learned that just to be me was fine. When I decided I wanted to change this or that, then I'd work at it. Not being perfect, never bothered me - well, not once I made it through adolescence. Adolescence would sure be a whole lot easier if it didn't occur until sometime after our fifty fifth birthday. By then, most folks seem to know they're perfect! (At least those of us who have no faults, do!)

-63- Nursery Nonsense

I do hope you're in a tolerant frame of mind, just now.
You see, last evening I baby-sat with a four-year old. A part
of his bedtime ritual is the reading of certain nursery rhymes.
Usually, they distress me. Last evening they tickled my funny
bone.

I say all that as an admittedly transparent defense for
what will undoubtedly follow. On days like this you've been
patient with me in the past. I hope you have it in your heart
one more time.

Now, I've never claimed to sport a perfect rhyme-
scheme nor to deliver impeccable meter, but today, even those
occasional slips of the pen, will pale by comparison.

Nursery Nonsense (a compilation!)

That wolf came to visit the piggies one day.
His first move - to devastate house made of hay!
If I'd huff and puff, I would faint dead away
'Cause ventilate - hyper - whenever I play!!

* * *

"The sky is falling!
The sky is falling!
So run, now, for your life!"
I told them,
"Just a minute -
Have to, *first*, check with my wife!"

* * *

He'd tell a lie.
His nose would grow -
That boy, Pinocchio!
I'd best not lie
'Cause my short nose
Is hard enough to blow!

* * *

Jack jumped over the candlestick!
That's something I'd not dare!
Throw out my back! Have wounds to lick!
Would fry my derrière!

* * *

Those eyes looked way too big to "Red,"
As wolf lay in that bed.
With my eyesight,
Proposed, that night!
Why do you 'spose 'she' fled???

And here's a brand new "nursery rhyme" just for the older set.

Gramma Shines

Mary had a little Gram
Who's hair was white as snow
And everywhere that Mary went
She found ol' Gram, too slow!

Gram followed her to school one day
Which was against no rule.
The other kids asked Gram to play.
She was a hit at school.

Ol' Gramma rocked the little ones
And helped Sam learn his "times."
Both Gram and kids had lots of fun.
Our hero, Gram, did shine!

Schools are great places to grow young again!!!

-64- Growing Old And Staying Young

Not long ago a four year old girl asked me if I had ever been a little boy. My answer to her, out in the open, was, "Oh, yes. When I was your age, I was a little boy." That answer seemed to satisfy her. My answer to myself, inside my head, was, "Oh, yes, and I still am," and that, seemed to satisfy me.

It's funny - funny strange, not funny ha ha - how that face in the mirror keeps getting older, but the head inside that face doesn't. Well, for some it doesn't, and I'm sure glad I'm one of those. Folks who allow themselves to age on the inside, right along with their outside, have just somehow missed the whole point. Flesh must age but spirit need not!

Growing Old And Staying Young

At eighteen, wondered how 'twould be
To find oneself quite old.
With body weak, it seemed to me
The saddest story told.

I took great pride in how I looked.
I ran and lifted weights.
It seemed to work, 'cause I sure hooked
Some gorgeous looking dates!

So, aging frightened me a bit.
Would ladies still be pleased
When I'd prefer to walk or sit
And creak when bent my knees?

The natural course of life seems wise.
It changes gradually.
Our aging wears a fine disguise
So, day by day, can't see.

Well, now I'm old. How does it feel?
Though I'm no longer lean,
I find, today, inside I real-
ly do, still feel eighteen!!

My dance may be slower, but I still dance. I dance with the wind before the storms and the moonbeams on cool, clear autumn nights. I dance with the child in her innocence and the grandmother in her wisdom. I dance in memory as if again sixteen, and feel the rush of blood surging through my being and the tossing of my hair as my body twists and turns and forms itself beautifully to the strains of the music. I dance away from dark danger and wrong-doing, and toward the safety of light and friends and selfless pleasures.

The dances of our lives! May we always delight in the music of the spheres, and step to the beat of the wise drums of the ages.

-65- Once Upon A Time ...

A child's mind is wonderful. It never feels compelled to be tied to where it actually is at the moment. Atop the picnic table, one can be climbing the World's tallest mountain. Underneath that table, one is in the biggest, darkest, cave imaginable. Turn it upside down and you're a pirate on a tall-mast sailing ship, seeking adventure and buried treasure on a desert island. On its side and you're shooting at the bad guys from behind a boulder out on the range.

Somewhere along the way, so many folks seem to lose that ability to let their imaginations soar with the wind. I sincerely urge any of you in that predicament, to give it another try.

Once Upon A Time ...

Though started like most other days,
All that, was soon to change.
When e're recalled, I'm still amazed!
Events were very strange!!

A little box came in the mail.
A jar inside - quite large,
Containing pills I'd bought on sale.
(I'd used my Master Charge!)

"A wonder pill," the label read.
Take four each day and you
Will find you have a clearer head,
And energy, brand new!

I gulped them down and sure enough,
I started feeling strong.
I gardened, did all kinds of stuff!
Had pep that whole day long.

It seemed I didn't have a care.
And mirror did reveal
That I was sporting darker hair.
Those pills were quite a deal!

'Twas great, the energy I'd found!
I felt like new-born pup!!
Then, soon, I heard this ringing sound!
Alarm clock!! I woke up!!!

When I was still relatively young, I made an important discovery. I was able to do so because I had not yet learned to limit my imagination like grownups often do. I reasoned that in night dreams, ones perception was so transformed, you truly believed the dream was real. I knew that my daytime fantasies - my daydreams - could transform reality for me in that very same way. Why not find ways to make that skill work wonders for others and me?

I have spent most of my professional life doing just that; finding ways to help us use our imagination - our mental visualization skill - to make us feel better, to change our outlook and even to cure fears, phobias and many bodily ailments. (Some of the books that tell about all that are listed at the end of this volume.)

Give it a try. Visualize who or how you want to be or feel and help yourself to a new and remarkable life. Shucks, if silly old Grampa Gray can do it, surely you can. Give it a try if for no other reason than a good fantasy is a whole lot cheaper than aspirin.

I have a new, dear friend who polishes the things I write before they are published. She deletes most of my beloved commas, tosses aside my delightful dashes, divides my lingering long rambling sentences into several shorter ones, and, as you may have guessed, corrects my spelling. Most of us who write would never look so good without our dedicated editors.

The point I'm sneaking up to is this: I often hear her giggling as she pours over my manuscripts. I have now discerned at least two types of giggles. One represents

genuine amusement at what she has read. The other, usually accompanied by a shake of the head, suggests her amazement that any writer could so consistently, spell so poorly.

I'm glad she can giggle at it all. As I recall, many a teacher in my past, did not find it at all amusing. I have to wonder why I have not been the complete failure several of them predicted I would be. Alas, there must be some things more important in life than spelling, punctuation and handwriting.

-66- Word Stew

I knew all kinds of wonderful, descriptive, feeling-filled words I just had to use on paper, long before I could figure out how to remember their spelling. Neatness, organization and spelling may still not be my forte (or is that fort?), but it is quite (quiet?) necessary (neseccary?) if one (won?) is to (two, too?) succeed (succede?).

Thank goodness my early teachers focused on my ideas. After all, those other things do improve over time. Don't they?

Now lets see, if I can just make out the notes which I scribbled on this place mat before I dropped it in the bathtub, I'll get right to the verse of the day.

Word Stew (a groaner!)

Now this one's just for fun, you see!

Red pencils, put away!!

And if you need to groan, feel free!!!

'Cause that will make my day!!!!

Three words, their spelling's, I'd confuse -

Marriage, meringue, mirage.

I'd always err when had to choose -

No way, *that* fate, could dodge!

In writing of divorce, I'd say,

"While wife got the garage,

The husband drove the car away,

Thus ending the mirage."

"The newly weds, alone, at last.

Such loving hearts they brang.

To taste, at last, the sweetness - vast -

That comes but with meringue!"

In desert - hot - appeared a lane,
With horse and fine carriage.
They'd come so far! Endured pain!
Alas, 'twas just marriage."

Aside from meter out of sink
And spellings much confused,
Some truths seeped through, though, don't you think!
At least eye wuz ammuzzed!

-67- Playgrounds?

Progress is an interesting concept. What was in yesterday is out today but just may be in again tomorrow. Knowing this, as only we oldsters can, probably makes us more patient. I know it amuses me, as I sit back and watch the newest, most modern trends reenter the stream of day to day life.

Some things that were once just fine, however, don't seem to find renewed favor. I suppose when values change, some things may be gone forever (or until values change back!).

Sometimes, it's not so much that the value has changed, but that it seems to have been lost in the shuffle.

Playgrounds?

I loved our schoolyard, when a boy.

Large spots of grass and dirt.

We'd rough and tumble! What a joy!

So soft, no one got hurt.

One large paved walk for hopscotch play,

For shuffle board, one more.

The rest, on even rainy days,

Allowed grand fun out doors!

I can't remember one skinned knee

(Though football drew some blood!),

Torn shirts, sewed up so easily,

Could wash away the mud.

There is a grade school near my place.

Its yard all paved in black.

Skinned knee and nose and chin and face

Come daily - it's a fact!

But now NO muddy shoes are there!

NO grass stained pants from skids!

You'd think the clothing that kids wear,

More precious than the kids!

Sometimes I am amazed how dumb
Such smart folks seem to be
Stained pants sure didn't keep me from
An education, see!

One night when I was fifteen or so, I felt I was making
fantastic progress, but even that needed reevaluation.

Once Upon A Starlit Night.

Now I had kissed a girl before,
But that night on the hill,
It made my very being soar -
I could not get my fill!

I asked her, "Could we kiss again?"
She said, "No, not that night."
'Twas just as well, 'cause each time when
We kissed, my tongue, she'd bite!

-68- Those Scrubbing Bubbles

I so often see things that remind me of other, seemingly unrelated things. Television has become a great source for such inspiration. Saturday mornings, little blue men remind me of race relations. Ads for indestructible knives remind me of adolescent boldness paled by old age. Well, you get the idea.

Hardly any commercial escapes my twisted view of reality. I see passion in oven cleaners, hope in ads for real estate brokers, and the futility of bickering in political spots.

I particularly find the animated commercials a bountiful source for such comparisons. For example ...

Those Scrubbing Bubbles

I love that Scrubbing Bubble, ad.

What happy little guys!
They work so hard! Are never sad!
His very best, each tries!!

You talk about enjoying work! -
They grin from ear to ear!
No dirty scum they'll leave to lurk.
A spotless tub! No fear!!

Then once their job is done, with glee,
They hustle down the drain,
So proud, content, fulfilled, you see,
You'll not hear one complain!

I hope, when "down that drain" I go,
That, like those bubbles, I,
Will, too, be proud, because I'll know,
I gave life MY best try!!

And speaking of foolishness, which for me, at least, never goes out of style ...

Once Upon A Thistle

That thistle's beauty sang to me.
When touched, though, changed its song.
Enjoy me from a distance, see,
Then, we shall get along!

Once Upon A Hill Of Ants

While sitting on the ground to rest
I spied a line of ants.
"Where are you off to," I did jest.
Soon found out. In my pants!

Just For Fun!

Gals, Roses are yellow,
Some Violets are blue,
Old Guys may seem mellow
But we're watching you!

Speaking of Romance

Two girls both loved me so much,
I married both of them -
now wasn't that big-a-me?

-69- Folk Poetry

Recently, after attending my program, an older woman came up to me and asked, "What are you, anyway? I enjoyed your show, but I've certainly never heard poetry like yours before. You seem to be a cross between a philosopher and a tramp."

For forty years, I've been trying to figure out what I am, and after only ninety minutes she had me pegged, dead center!

Folk Poetry
(and those who commit it!)

Now, poets come in two main breeds,
The Regular and Folk.
I'll try to separate their deeds -
We're different, no joke!

The Poet, Regular, does see
Grand beauty in those things
In which most people do agree
Grand beauty truly rings.

They write of sunrise, sea and love,
Of rainbow and balloon.
They tend to call the pigeon, "dove",
Won't mention pig or loon.

The Poet, Folk, prefers to seek
His beauty in the street.
So, hope, he sees, where things seem bleak,
What's common, he thinks neat!!

He calls a pigeon, pigeon, friends.
In aging finds a grin.
And though sometimes the truth he bends,
He writes of where you've been.

Let's try this still another way -
He sees the beauty in
The way things really are each day -
Flat tire, spill, or grin!!

So, when of "Purple Majesty"
You hear from this old guy,
Instead of mountains, it will be
About my first black eye!!!

I'm not putting down Regular Poets. I hope you understand that. I admire their skill and literary prowess. It just always seemed to me that it doesn't take much intelligence to discover that beautiful things are beautiful.

Options. I suppose I think more about the options or the alternative ways to look at things than do most folks. When a clerk is rude to me I wonder what unhappiness has come her way that day and ponder ways to make her feel better. When a rain storm interrupts my picnic, I make a game of finding refuge, caveman style. When a virus invades my being and I find myself laid up for a day or so, I make mental lists of which things I will enjoy doing or seeing the most once the ailment passes. When I foul up I chuckle about it first and then ask myself what I just learned from it.

Actually, I take my mistakes quite seriously. A wise man once told me that to become truly wise, one needed to have made lots of errors during his lifetime AND to have learned something useful from each and every one of them.

Perhaps my approach to verse is merely an attempt to learn great things from that which to most, tends to seem insignificant.

-70- Poetic Surgery

Poets get to do things with the written language that no one else would dare do. It's been called "poetic license" - a term, no doubt, invented by the poets themselves, to cover the liberties they take so freely.

Not long ago, a sixth grader, whom I sometimes help with his English assignments, complained to me that the very things he gets marked off for, I get paid for! (I didn't say he was dumb, just needed help with English!)

I gave him the usual rubbish about how you have to know how to do it right first. Neither one of us truly believed it!

Poetic Surgery

It's great to be a poet, 'cause
Grand shortcuts you can take.
When words won't fit, he merely does
A small poetic break.

Because becomes just, 'cause, you see.
And family - fam'ly.
A memory, becomes mem'ry.
It was, just 'twas, can be.

And when you need to spread one out,
Like "athlete" is too small.
We just toss "Athalete" about
A poet's right, y'all!

Then, when the rhythmic meter we
Must alter for a time,
Word that's out of sync, you see,
We merely underline!

And when, no space for verbs, can find,
Attach an "S" for "is".
Then that's no longer any bind -
The "S" solution, 'tis!

Sometimes, when speaking, I forget
And use a 'twas or e'er.
If that occurs, don't get upset,
Just blame it on gray hair!

The Nonsense Never Stops!

On horseback, Sheriff chased a man
Who'd just broke out of jail.
S'pose for a title that I can,
"A Con-Quest," call this tale?

Ex-prisoner said that he could
Make pipe that would not fail.
Suppose, for this, a title good,
Might be, "Con-do-it Tale?"

(Only the truly brave- or foolish - will venture beyond this
point!)

A Verse In Search of a Title

Up the stem that ant did climb,
On wild herb, called thyme.
This verse needs title, quite sublime -
S'pose, "Once Upon A Thyme?"

-71- The Day-Old Shelf

Four things that seem to have endured, are the day-old shelf at the grocery, the guarantee, that wonderfully unique teen-age mentality, and constipation. The first of these I still appreciate, the middle two just confuse me, and the last I endure!

The Day-Old Shelf

That second day shelf at the store -
Temptation, plain and bold!!
I need one item - then buy four!
Who cares if they're day-old!

Can't figure why fresh goods folks seek
When, least for me, it's true,
My bread has been at home a week,
So, Day Old stuff seems new!!

The Guarantee?

When I was young, a guarantee
Meant it would always work -
Last forever, always be
Just fine, no flaw or quirk!

These days the guarantee has changed.
It covers everything
Except parts prone to break - so strange!
It has that Con Man ring!

I bought an iron recently.
Its guarantee did say,
"Be known to all, this warranty,
Expired yesterday!"

A Teen Thing!

"Why do you walk, when you could ride?"
A teen asks as we talk.
"You'd need not ask, if you'd but try
Enjoying just ONE walk!"

I've often mused why God would waste
Two legs on teens at all.
Perhaps for use, they were not placed,
But just to make them tall.

I heard a young man groan and moan
That after track he'd need
A ride to get himself back home
To walk, too rough a deed!

Clogged Pipes

My sink was clogged this morning (GRIPE!)
But then, guess, so was I!
So poured some Draino down the pipe,
Then drank a cup! Oh, my!!!

-72- The Prize In The Box

Way back in the old days, the cereal boxes would frequently contain some wonderful memento from one of our radio heroes - Superman, The Lone Ranger, Captain Midnight. Those were, I think, a different breed of hero than what the children seem to have today. The Lone Ranger never killed anyone. Superman, with all of his powers never used more force than necessary. Captain Midnight out maneuvered the bad guys. Their cereal box prizes followed suit - decoder rings, secret whistles, goggles - all great, but also, all pretty non-violent.

I must admit, I'm not really up to date on all these new heroes.

The Prize In The Box

When young, it made my breakfast great -
Those prizes in the box!
Perhaps a truck or car - first rate,
Or wondrous magic rock!

It recently occurred to me
That Bran Flakes don't contain
Prizes of my youth, you see,
Their contents are quite plain!

So, bought a cereal for kids,
But stuck to Momma's rule:
You couldn't dig to find it hid -
Must eat to earn that jewel!

For six days in a row I had
A sugar rush all day!
I cleaned! I waxed!! I washed!!!-not bad!
Then, fainted dead away!

Then came that morning! There it lay!
In cellophane was wrapped.
Excited like a kid that day!
I giggled, grinned and clapped!

But soon, delight began to slow,
Excitement left, because,
I just had absolutely NO
Idea what it was!!

I'm not sure who coined the term, Generation Gap, but it truly is descriptive of the condition. In fact, not long ago I overheard a sixteen year old ask a seven year old what was meant by some new phrase the younger one was using. After witnessing that mini-generation gap, I somehow, felt a lot better.

That sixteen-year old taught me a good lesson. If I don't understand something a youngster is saying or why he is doing it, I should just ask. Now why hadn't I thought of that? At once the Gap is bridged. At least the meaning gap is bridged. I suppose the value gap may still exist. But then, there's a value gap between me and the old guy next door so perhaps that has less to do with age and more to do with . . .

-73- Tapioca

I haven't been what you would call skinny since I was thirteen. In fact, I haven't been what you would call, merely stout, since I was forty. Since then, it's been that proverbial roller-coaster between my fat and my really fat wardrobes. It's dumb, I know!

Once I get on a diet, I am the best dieter you ever saw. Really! I never cheat. I'll just do fine and be so proud of myself, looking down my nose at those who should be doing this diet-thing right along with me. Arrogant may be the word for which I'm searching. Self-righteous!! That's even better!!

This week, once again, I began a diet! Of course, from reading my verses today, you would never, in a million years, have guessed that!!

Tapioca

Now, tapioca is my friend,
When grin at it I see
A hundred twinkling eyes which send
Grand smiles back to me!

Jello

Red Jello jiggles all about!
It does a "twist-like" dance!
'Tis such a happy food, no doubt!,
Should let it live! - FAT CHANCE!!

Cotton Candy

Those cotton candies seem so much,
But this, I have to say,
No sooner than your lips they touch,
Than they will melt away!

Candy Bars

A Snickers or a Milky Way?
Just one's the nutty guy.
But which is which, I cannot say,
So both, each day, must try!!

Vanilla Anythings

Vanilla, some complain and whine,
Is bland and plain, but still,
When your new diet's dull as mine,
Vanilla's quite a thrill!!!

Actually I enjoy fruit and Jello and even diet puddings. I like vegetables, cereal and bread. Most things that are good for one, I have always eaten regularly. My diet, therefore, actually contains nothing new and nothing that I really don't enjoy. I shouldn't be complaining.

It's just that after my lunch of one scant turkey sandwich, a can of V-8 and a sliced orange, I miss that little extra sweetness - a dozen donuts covered in powdered sugar and downed with a quart of rich four percent milk, topped off with a small sack of potato chips for balance and high blood pressure.

-74- Old Enough?

Being old, once seemed so far away. Now, being young seems so far away. It's interesting how perspectives change. When I was about three, I suppose, and my brother several years older, I knew that someday soon, he would be small and I would be big. Then, I'd fix his wagon, good!

It didn't turn out that way. Luckily, I eventually grew quite fond of him. We were very good friends, regardless of our ages. I watched him carefully and learned, well, what to avoid when I became his age. But somehow, you know, I went ahead and made those very same dumb mistakes anyway!

Old Enough?

When I was four, those kids of five
Seemed grown-up as could be.
Could do most things toward which I'd strive -
Tie shoes, zip pants, work key!

When I was five - my brother, ten -
I thought he was so old.
Then, I could hardly wait till when
Ten years, to me, life doled.

When I turned ten, that thirty-age,
Looked ancient - past the prime!
Had much to do before that page
Turned in MY Book of Time.

At thirty, sixty-five seemed dead!!!
Who'd want to still be here?
The whole idea spun my head!
Unthinkable, I'd fear!

At sixty-five, I still felt young,
But those, then eighty plus,
Seemed teetering on that last rung,
Not long to climb with us.

It's strange, how time affects our gauge
When judging years. You see,
These days, folks, just two-thirds my age,
Seem terr'bly old to me!!!

I realize that I write a lot about getting old, but then,
what, pray tell, do I know more about than that? I always
wanted to be an expert on something. Little did I know ...

It has been said that age is a state of mind. I believe
that. Inside my head, I still tend to think of myself as
eighteen. I have learned to temper that realistically when it
comes to the body (well, mostly!). I am also releived that I
can claim a degree of wisdom I had not yet obtained back
when I was eighteen. I still dream the way I did at ten.
Sometimes I filter those dreams through years of experience,
but often I don't. The latter are particularly nice moments.

Being several ages all at once is invigorating. I feel
sorry for those who are all one age. How boring that must be.

-75- A Place For Everyone

I was chatting with a teenage friend last evening. He was talking about being "in" and "out," socially. Now, I'm not so blind to my own past as to have forgotten how important being "in" was, even back then. There is a difference today, however. In the old days, if you were a nice person, a hard worker, and had some social skills, you were pretty well "in." Not so today. It seems you have to think about social class, school class, grades, race, parent's occupations, religion, special skills (athletic, musical), and whether or not you drink, do drugs, or "do it." All the barriers to happiness today. How did we manage to build so many?

A Place For Everyone

I know a very friendly place
Where young and old can meet,
With kids and grandfolks face to face,
And Moms and Dads to greet.

A place where, equal, all folks are.
Such comfort you will find.
Religion, race and class are far
From everybody's mind.

Each goes about his special tasks,
Then sits and chats a while.
The Grampas talk with kids who ask
Of things long out of style.

Young mothers get quite good advice
From ladies, long since grey.
And children learn to play so nice,
There on this special day.

The college guy and bagger boy
Can mix and have such fun!
'Tis filled with comfort, grins and joy.
A place for everyone!

If sounds to good, folks, to be true -
This grand place where I chat -
It's also there, each day, for you!
The friendly Laundromat!!

My tongue is only partially in my cheek on this one.
Communication and friendship are often just a matter of
washing away the concept of class and relating human being
to human being. There are so many artificial barriers.

VIP's

When I first learned of VIPs
I was confused, complete.
I thought that everybody, see,
Was really pretty neat!

If only some deserved that "V",
Then what did others get?
An "L", one possibility,
For "Less", would stand, I bet.

Or "U" for "Unimportant P's"
Or "N" for "Never I".
Or "S" could be used, if you please
"Sometimes Important Guy".

I thought about the VIP
Thing long and hard when small.
Concluded, if were up to me,
We'd not "IP" at all!!!

-76- Pathways To Nowhere???

I feel nostalgic today. Everything I see or hear, seems to remind me of things that used to be. I must admit that just after my wife passed away, I used to hate days like this. It seemed every memory was tied to her, and for some reason, I let that make me sad. Sad because I focused on my loss and not on those wonderful memories we had made together.

I'm pretty well over those sad times now and I relish days like today. The robin, the rose, even the garbage truck have provided grins and chuckles this morning.

Pathways To Nowhere???

A vacant lot with several trees,
The grass, unmown and tall,
A path leads in, as if to tease
Me as I came to call.

A path to nowhere, so it seemed,
With iris 'long its side.
The water in the birdbath gleamed!
Old steps, in brush, I spied.

Had been a house there once, I'm sure.
It prob'ly had stood tall.
The wind and rain it had endured,
Protecting families, all.

The stories that old path could tell -
Of hopscotch, trikes, and race -
Of times, from bikes, the young boys fell -
Of Summer dress of lace.

Of sitting on the porch at night
As evening breezes blew,
And lovers kissed there, out of sight,
The way they used to do.

A path to nowhere? No sir-ee!
All paths have dreams to share.
They each hold precious memories
Of wondrous times, once there.

Looking back often needs to be balanced a bit.

Tomorrows Never Come

One morning it occurred to me,
Tomorrows never come.
Last night, tomorrow, NOW would be.
Where did today come from?

And then, of course, there's yesterday
About which should be said,
'Twas just a day ago, today!"
Made spinning in my head!

Seemed any day could be today,
Tomorrow, or next week.
Yesterdays exist today
In mem'ries we can seek.

Would you believe the day that I
Was born, was once today?
How could that be? I wondered, why?
A mystery, I'd say!

It came to me, just recently,
Tomorrow's far away,
And yesterdays are gone, you see -
So I enjoy TODAY!

-77- Contentment !

Growing old is a mixed bag. Lots of good stuff and lots of, well.... It's great to have the time to watch people, to sit and talk with neighbors, to play catch with five year olds. It's great to actually get paid for the strange verses you would be writing for your own amusement, anyway. It's great to have a life time of experiences to draw upon when young friends desire wise counsel. It's great to just still be around to see the flowers, hear the birds, feel the sun, sing the songs, and do your thing - whatever that might be.

And then, there are those times when one's memories, past experiences, and wisdom just aren't of much consolation!

Contentment !

Along my daily walking route
Are many dogs that bark.
They sound alert, when there about
Come strangers - day or dark.

There's one old dog I like a lot.
He's 'bout my age, I'd say.
He seeks the shade when it is hot,
And sun on coolish days.

The only time he barks at all
Is when his young dog friends
Are all asleep and they can't call,
Then one faint yip he sends.

It seems that he and I both know
Contentment is the key.
While young guys need their skills to show,
We're happy just to be!!

I'm truly grateful that most times are that way because

...

Sometimes I Feel SOOO Dumb!

I took new VCR from box.
Just sat and flashed at me.
So had a friend come set the clock.
Embarrassed !! He's just three!!!!

Putting everything together, however, It is a pretty
fine life I live.

Who Would I Be?

Pretend I could be anyone.
Let's see, who would I be?
I truly think it is quite won-
derful to just be me!!

-78- To mind my Ps and Qs.

I'm not sure if I just came from an exceptional family, or if parenting techniques have really changed dramatically over the past fifty years. I was usually told what was expected of me; how I was to act; what was acceptable behavior. These days it seems I hear most parents telling their children what not to do. What is not allowed. A long list of no nos and very little guidance about what is correct. I certainly hope that my recent parenting sample is not representative of what kids really are being told these days.

I must admit, even with superior parents, I was sometimes confused by their shorthand!!

Ps and Qs

I never knew just what it meant -
To mind my Ps and Qs.
But seemed I got that message sent
When e'er some guests were due.

I think I figured out the Q.
It stood for QUESTIONS - None!
Now, they could ask dumb things, but you
think I could? Not a one!!.

That P, though, stumped me, don't you see.
Don't panic or persist?
Have pleasant personality?
Don't punch them with your phist!

Decided, as the years went by,
The P words modified.
Be playful, passive, plain, at five
At nine, just Please go hide!

At ten, no "pus" or "puke" allowed!
At twelve, try for pristine!
They spelled one out quite clear and loud
NO PASSION, when a teen!!!

These days, instead of Ps and Qs
They're Qs and Ps - regrouped.
No doubt, now, which two words to use!
Can only mean, Quite Pooped!

And of course since I had such fantastic parents, I
could become nothing less?

Grow Up!

One day I'd had it with my son!
I flew into a rage!!
"Seems all you ever want is fun -
Grow up and act you age."

It's tough out there, Son, don't you see?
Where is your spunk and drive?"
He had the nerve to say to me,
"But Dad, I'm only five!"

-79- Old Houses, Old Men

Who do you see when you look in the mirror? I got to wondering if who I see there, is really what's reflected there, or if it is just what I want to see reflected there. Perhaps a few less wrinkles. Hair a bit darker. Face a bit more handsome. Boy, if that's true, then, I'm really in trouble, because what I see, sure isn't what it used to be!

The same kind of thing holds true as I make plans. I tend to plan as if I still had the energy of a twenty year old. Mentally, I still do! Some days, I just can't convince this old body to keep up!

Old Houses, Old Men

For years, I've walked down White Oak Lane.

One house stood out to me.

'Twas old. Its roof let in the rain -

Much broken glass could see.

It's been remodeled, recently.

The roof and windows, new.

A paint job done most carefully,

A soft, old fashioned blue.

When done, must say, a real surprise!

It looks 'most new, you see!!

D'you s'pose that I could get those guys

To do a job on me!!!

Energy!?

I was a hyperactive lad,

My, how I got things done!

From dawn to dark such pep I had

Pure energetic fun!!

I thought most folks, quite poky were,
'Cause really didn't see,
'Twas I, who raced at 90 per,
While par was 33!

As teen, with vigor I'd still step!
Could dance 'til most were numb!
Now, look back fondly on that Pep.
Sure wish I'd bottled some!!

Looking Back

Well, looking back's been fun, for me -
A smile, a laugh, a tear -
Such memories help me to see
Today, through eyes more clear.

Exciting days were fun, all right!
Romantic times were, too.
The dang'rous, harebrained schemes gave quite
The scares! Glad THEY are through!

Perhaps I was just lucky, to
Those days of old, survive.
It seems a miracle - quite true -
That I am still alive!

If could, would I relive again
Those days of yesteryear,
And change things from how they were then?
NO THANKS! They got me here!

-80- Sunrise

Well, it appears that this journey through time and trivia is about to draw to a close. It may, therefore, seem to be an odd place to extol the virtues of a sunrise - an event that begins each day. I place it here with the hope that this is just the beginning of a continuing, wonder-filled journey for you, along life's pathways of pleasures, and up lush hills of happiness!

Sunrise

Though sunset's beauty, won't deny,
I highly recommend
You start each day with eyes raised high -
Let sunrise greet you, friend.

At first, horizon's distant glow,
With random rays of light
That chase the shadows down below
As if to tease the night.

Soft bands of hues across the sky -
So tentative, at first -
And then explode, as if the dye
From painter's pots had burst!

I've found one never can be sure
When sunrise, dim, gives way,
But soon, that wondrous heav'nly blur
Submits to light of day.

Each sunrise promises, anew,
Another day is mine
In which to work and play and do
Those things that make life shine.

So, hope you'll take the time to view
The sunrise serenade.
I wish just splendid ones for you,
And pray they'll never fade!

-81- Barns Are People, Too!

Anthropomorphic. The dictionary tells us it means giving human-like characteristics to non-human entities. I know! I know! Where would I be without it!! I give feelings to fences, thoughts to thunder, and creativity to crabs!! Do you suppose that non-humans have a similar concept that means, "non-human-like characteristics attributed to humans"? I think we've done it for them! Built like a brick. Rocks in his head. Smart as a whip. Sleeps like a log. Sharp as a tack. What would their term be? Absurdamorphic, or, (and I do shudder to contemplate it) perhaps, even the term, "poetic"!

Barns Are People, Too!

I s'pose that you have noticed, too, -
Those faces on the barns.
Doors and windows, look at you,.
With fences for their arms.

Some barns look sad, with mouths turned down,
As if they're quite worn out.
They're often bare or painted brown.
Few friendly folks about.

Still others grin from ear to ear,
With dimples smiling there!!
Grand laughter one can almost hear -
(Try list'ning, if you dare!)

Some wear a look of great surprise!!!
Their mouths - a lasso, round.
With pointed brows above their eyes.
(I hope, good news, they've found!)

The ones I like the best, I'd say,
Are those who seem quite old.
Like me, look wrinkled - roof quite grey,
Such mem'ries we both hold!

I hope the barns don't mind this fun!
They're wonderful to see!
And as I study them, I wonder
Der what they think of me!!!!

On more than a few occasions, my imagination got me into trouble as a youngster. Over the long haul, however, it has served me well. I often wonder what my first grade teacher would think if she knew I had actually been able to make a living using what she had once referred to as, "The Devil Himself within you that makes you think thoughts no sane lad should have."

Bless her heart, if she had had her way, no new thoughts would have ever been thought. No new ways would have ever been attempted. No new relationships would have ever been risked. Perhaps that's why she was such a sad person - she had never felt free to risk - to try anything new. As I recall, I once suggested that to her, and spent the next week in the principal's office. (That was, without a doubt, my best week of first grade!)

-82- Balloons?

Sometimes, here, it may appear that I am against change.
That's really not true. But, still, it is difficult at times not to
yearn for the way things were - for what used to be familiar
and just expected.

Toys are one example. Mine were mostly solid wood - the
trucks, the train, the axe, the ship. They lasted throughout my
boy-hood and even through that of my son. Most of them still
have a favored place up in the attic. Then came metal,
followed by plastic, and now, even multi-ply pasteboard.
Remember when balloons were really balloons?

Balloons?

Balloons - Those magic bubbles, bright,
That bob and bounce and float.
A truly wondrous, happy sight!
For fun, they get my vote!

So versatile these balls of air.
When blow them up by hand,
Can toss them high as you would dare -
Somehow they'll always land!

The gas-filled kind tug at their string,
Impatient to take flight.
Set free, you have a happening,
As they soar out of sight!

I like the red ones best - no blue -
No yellow - no chartreuse!
Perhaps the green, quite fine, would do,
Or mauve or subtle puce!

Balloons, back in the good old days,
Were rubber, soft and round.
I sought one, recently - Amazed!!
Such choices now abound!!

"Aluminum or plastic, Sir?"
"I'd like the rubber kind."
"String or stick or velcro, Sir?"
TOO MUCH ! I just declined!!!

I like to think of myself as open-minded toward new things, although I do realize I pick and choose which new things to be open minded about. When my son was about fourteen he said to me, "Dad, you're the most conservative liberal, I've ever known." By the time he was twenty four he was saying, "Dad, you're the most liberal conservative, I've ever known."

I believe he was correct on both counts. I'm not sure if I actually changed, or if, as the World changed about me, my early liberal position just came to be redefined as conservative. In either case, I still like both old barns and rubber balloons, but I must admit, the sights of the shuttle taking off and returning safely, take my breath away.

-83- If You Want The Job Done Right ...

Workmanship. We hear a lot of pros and cons (too often, cons, I'm afraid). Oh, I know there are still a large number of fine craftsmen (Or must I now say "Craftspeople"?) out there who take great pride in their work. Their signature or their word is as good as gold. Sometimes, they're hard to find. I was commenting on this to a new, young acquaintance not long ago, and he said, "Wise up! That's the American Way - only do as good a job as is needed to get by. That's all people expect."

That didn't used to be The American Way, did it? My, my!

If You Want The Job Done Right ...

I called a workman in one day
To fix a broken pane.
I asked him what I'd have to pay
To keep out wind and rain.

'Bout twenty bucks, he said, unless
You want the job done right!!
The charge he'd quote me THEN, I guess,
Would have been out of sight!

So, I decided I would fix
The window - all alone.
The pane, itself, cost 2 - 0 - 6!
At that, I had to groan!

The putty - needed just a bit -
But had to buy a pound.
To have the glass pane cut to fit -
Two dollars more, I found!

At any rate, I soon displayed
A window, all repaired.
Through wind and rain and snow has stayed!
THAT workman, really cared!

Now, several years have passed since I
Put in that window light.
Do you suppose that workman guy
Would think I'd done it RIGHT?

Many years ago a youngster from the neighborhood and I spent the morning making "Chocolate Pudding Surprise." Her mother delighted in telling me the recipe as related to her by her daughter.

"First you go to the refrigerator to get the milk and you get a wet washrag and wash off the handle because it's sticky. Then you dump the pudding mix into a bowl with the milk and tear the box flat before you throw it away. You stir it with a wooden spoon first and then change to a silver spoon when it sticks too much to the wooden one. Next you set it on the celler steps to cool and go out to the back porch and rock while you lick the bowl clean. After the squirrels play chase and cross the wire to the Anderson's yard, you go back inside and the pudding is all ready to eat."

Now there is a young lady who knows how to make Chocolate Pudding Surprise the RIGHT way!

-84- The Sun

I'm told, that as a youngster, I seldom asked "why", but instead, would reel off some thoughtful explanation that made sense to me. ("That red post [hydrant] is there to keep cars from running into people standing on the sidewalk." "The clutch gets the power ready and then the gear-shift sends it into the motor." "Leaves are green because green is made up of yellow and blue and yellow is the same color as the sun and lets it into the leaf and the blue closes the door and holds it in.")"

Although I can't explain it, my own son was the very same way. The only "why" question I recall him ever asking was short and sweet: "Why women?!" (He was fifteen, and trying so hard to understand the ins and outs of romantic relation-ships!)

I still prefer some of my childhood explanations to reality!

The Sun

The sunshine! Everyday it's here
To do its things for me.
Its warm red glow provides such cheer.
Sends light so we can see.

I marveled, when a little guy
That such a tiny spot,
Just floating daily 'cross the sky,
Could be so bright and hot!

I figured that when Winter came
It tired out a bit.
It didn't warm the World the same.
The days, far shorter, lit.

It was a master artist, too.
'Bout that I had no doubt!
Such things, at sunset, it could do
By spreading hues about!!!

Its rays could grow the trees so tall,
Yet gently kiss my skin,
With tan that lasted through the fall -
A hint of what had been.

It seemed a shame I could not see
What kind of face it had.
But guessed, since strong and kind, that he
Must look a lot like Dad!!

I do remember one of my own, "Why," questions. One Sunday afternoon during the second world war I asked Dad why people started wars. The explanation was not satisfactory, but then, neither has any been since then.

It seemed so simple to me at four. If my Dad would just write the soldiers a letter and tell them to all send him their guns and bullets, it would all be over in a week. After all, Dad was the wisest man I knew, and I was certain everyone else surely felt the same way about him.

My! Being a father is a huge responsibility, isn't it. Even after I grew older (and wiser, myself), and realized that Dad was not the all powerful person I had earlier characterized him to be, my image of him never dimmed in the least. If he could be that wise and that honest and that dependable, even without being all powerful, he was indeed a greater man than had he posed that magical capacity.

-85- ANTS

I enjoy observing what goes on about me. I suppose I enjoy people the most, but it's also fun to watch the animals - squirrels, pets, and even the insects - as they do whatever it is they do.

Not long ago, as I sat in my back yard, I witnessed a hummingbird, as if perched there upon the air itself, its busy wings virtually invisible, humming its familiar tune, and dancing in hypnotic-like motion with the blossom of my trumpet plant. Such grace! Such beauty!! Such stamina!!! Speaking of stamina (which I, somehow, seem to value more and more each year), I also marveled at a line of tireless ants.

ANTS

I was intrigued, when just a boy,
That ants were everywhere!
And though most folks, they did annoy,
I studied them with care.

Outside, I'd sprinkle crumbs, as bait,
Then belly down quite near.
With chin propped up in hands, I'd wait
To see those ants appear.

It never seemed to take much time.
I was amazed each day!
Quite soon those guys would form a line
And tote those crumbs away.

Now, mother's house was spick and span -
About that, have no doubt!
But drop one tiny morsel, and
Quite soon, t'were ants about!

I studied pictures in my book -
A zillion ants, must be!!!
(I wondered if they ever took
The time to study me!)

One day it popped into my mind!
All ants are Moms, I'd guess,
'Cause like the ant, a mom can find
A kid's most well-hid mess!!!

There are ants and there are Aunts!

Auntie May

We all know Aunts are special folks.
Such fun to go and see.
They always laugh at youngster's jokes,
And never disagree!

I had one Aunt I loved to see.
Sometimes she'd come to stay.
She'd always spend time JUST with me!
I loved my Auntie May.

She'd take me to the Ice Cream Shop,
And to the picture show,
And afterwards we got to stop
And have a Sloppy Joe.

The one great thing she left behind
That I so oft' think of,
Grew from the way she was SO kind -
Her gift to me was love.

86- Poet Watching!

I usually have breakfast at a very nice little restaurant that just happens to be half way through my morning walk (what a coincidence!). I eat my pancakes, drink my coffee and watch the people. If time permits, I write a verse or two.

This morning I caught myself chuckling out loud as a couple - even older than I - chatted together. Neither one heard very well, so seldom did they really respond to what the other had actually said. But it made no difference. They had a great time!

I do hope others get as big a kick out of watching me as I do watching them! Let's roast a poet today!

Poet Watching!

The poet is the strangest breed!
He speaks in rhymes, absurd!
No matter how you beg and plead
He bugs you for that word.

That word that rhymes with "orange" would
Make him as pleased as punch!
And several rhymes for "both" are good,
And "else," he needs a bunch!

You'll find most poets, quiet guys.
They dress just as they please!
Wear spectacles to bolster eyes.
With words they love to tease!

They see the World as it could be.
They listen with their heart.
They sense the good in man and tree.
Their love of life, impart!

In tears, they see a prism, grand!
From laughter, sense despair.
Turn wind-chimes into marching band.
A leaf, to life, compare.

I know one poet pretty well -
Eccentric, gentle, free!
Has wild hair! Strange tales to tell!
I love him though - he's me!

I have observed that artists and poets who love themselves, feel free to risk letting others view their work. Those who are less sure about their own worth are also less apt to allow their creations to be seen. It is as if their personal worth as a human being is directly tied to the acceptance of their painting or poem.

Others, of course, - not just poets and artists - find themselves in this same unpleasant bind. Life is so much easier when we can say, "Hey, I like what I do (or who I am) and that's good enough. If anyone else also approves, that's a plus!"

-87- The Eye Of The Beholder

At some point in ones life, growing up changes to growing old. Most young folks think that growing up is just about the best thing since Milk Duds. (Do they still make Milk Duds?) All this nonsense I hear about how terrible it is to grow old, would just evaporate if we'd only hold on to that enthusiasm we originally had about growing up!

In fact, growing old can be even more fun. Remember, as a teen-ager, how hard it was to be different? How we agonized over our mistakes and our social faux pas? Well, if we have learned just one thing during this life of ours, I hope it is not to take oneself too seriously. Go forth and enjoy your foibles!!!

The Eye Of The Beholder

In judging age, I used to be
Quite accurate, indeed!
But now, I find it's hard for me
Those ages, all, to read.

These days, unless their hair is gray,
From clerk to college Dean,
Policemen, doctors, lawyers - They
All look, to me, fourteen!

Sometimes I wonder just how old
To strangers, I appear?
Perhaps it's best that I'm not told -
I'd hate to shed a tear!

Who cares how long I've worn this hat,
Or what these wrinkles mean?
The only thing that counts is that
Inside, I'm still eighteen!!!!

Oh, To Stay Up Late!

When I was still a little guy,
I just could hardly wait
'Til I would grow so big that I
Could stay up very late!

But by the time I got that age,
I worked so hard all day,
I'd get as far as that front page,
Then have to hit the hay!!

Girl Watching?

A teen asked, "Do old guys like you
Still watch the girls?" I said,
"My goodness, Son, of course I do,
I'm only OLD, not DEAD!"

Golden Oldie

My radio gave me the clue,
I'm old, I must admit!
Their golden Oldie was so new,
I'd never heard of it!!

Only As Old As You Feel

When I awake each morning, I
Am age eighteen once more!
What happens as the day goes by?
By night, I'm eighty four!!!

-88- Friendship Revisited

Now, I really do have lots of fine people-type friends. I say that, because today I've been thinking about all the other, non-people kinds of friends, that add quality and joy to my life. My home for example is such a friendly place for me. My yard and flowers and trees - all friends! It has occurred to me that, perhaps, the happiest folks around, might well be those of us who can form positive feelings toward the less than human aspects of our World. It's hard to be sad and lonely when your couch and books and jammies are among your best friends! I know, I'm really close to the edge on this one! (But I'm a poet, remember. I can get away with it!!!)

Friendship Revisited

It's prob'ly well I take my walk
Quite early in the day,
'Cause folks might think it strange I talk
To most things 'long the way.

I talk with all the cats and dogs,
The daffodils and trees,
The rocks and stumps and fallen logs,
Of course, the birds and bees.

I ask them how they are today
And say they're looking well.
I chuckle with the pups at play.
Them, weather forecasts, tell.

I offer some encouragement
To rock wall, falling down,
And to the flowers, sadly bent,
From lack of rain in town.

I'm sure that some of these old friends
Respond to me some days.
The Willow Tree, its branch extends -
The Mantis, for me, prays.

Broad grins from Little Squirrel that gnaws.
Its love, a Rose, confessed.
(Please, keep this secret, or might cause
My trip to "Shady Rest"!!!!)

Who knows? I just might really enjoy Shady Rest. I
imagine there would be some most interesting people there.
And, if I didn't like the people, I could always just continue
my comforting relationships with the squirrels and roses and
willow trees.

-89- House Numbers

I remember what a revelation it was to me, when I first discovered the difference between the concepts of "house" and "home." - That a house was the structure and the home was the atmosphere, the feeling, the relationships, that took place there.

It produced great pride - perhaps even vain pride - when I realized, that though I came from a poor, ramshackle house, I came from a rich and strong home! I would never again see my parents, my possessions or myself, in the same way. I even felt compassion for that old house - it couldn't help itself. Homes and houses. I think some folks still confuse the two concepts.!

House Numbers

The numbers on a house, I think,
Reveal a lot about
The folks who live there - form a link
'Tween house and home. No doubt!

Those numbers painted bright and bold
Suggest a home of fun!
It welcomes all, both young and old.
Has room for everyone!

Those numbers, small and black, denote
A home with little flair.
They watch TV, they work and vote,
But risks, they seldom dare.

Some add to numbers, their last name -
A proud and open place!
It says, "We're here and glad you came.
Come meet us face to face!"

A few, no numbers, have at all,
As if they just don't care,
Or have no friends to come to call -
A home so cold and bare.

Humungous numbers grace my porch!
They're yellow, red and blue!
My name is there with lighted torch,
To gladly welcome you!

If I were to distill my philosophy of life down to its bare essentials, it would probably say that our basic business as human beings is to thoughtfully go about helping other human beings. Isolating ourselves, therefore, would not find a place in ones life. Everyone's house numbers would need to be big and bold and ever-lit.

-90- Senior Chatizens

We're told that of the numerous elements that separate us from the other higher animals, there are several physical things that are of special importance. The top part of the brain that lets us contemplate and appreciate; the thumb, which allows us to manipulate our world in unique ways, and the power of speech, which allows us to communicate with our self and others.

For a poet, contemplating and appreciating are a must. And, without that marvelous thumb, we couldn't write or type. (I have difficulty enough with that thumb!) But most fascinating to me, is the power of speech and the beautiful, complex, spectrum of words that give it its power.

Senior folks can, perhaps, appreciate that power, best of all.

Senior Chatizens

Today, a younger friend of mine
Said he would like to know
Why old folks chatter all the time?
Why they love talking so!

"You talk to mailmen, even cops!
To strangers on the street,
To aunts and uncles, moms and pops -
Most everyone you meet."

"You even talk to cats and birds,
To kids at every turn,
I've even seen you talk to Nerds!
I guess you'll never learn!"

"You yell across the street at Bess
And she's deaf as a post.
You talk to flowers, trees, and, yes,
I've heard you talk to toast!"

"What is this thing with you old guys?
Your chatting never ends?"
I said, "I guess it's 'cause we're wise,
And treasure all, as friends!"

He's right, though, I do chat away
The whole time on my walk,
And when at home alone, must say,
Then, to myself, I talk!!!

I wish that I had asked that lad why he chose not to speak with those whom he encountered each day. Perhaps it was to protect himself from real or imagined dangers. Perhaps he was just shy or had not yet learned the art of inane patter (often called small talk!).

I have the hunch he felt he didn't have anything to say that anyone else would be interested in hearing. He missed the whole point, though, didn't he? Chatting isn't so much to communicate information as it is to share a feeling - a feeling of acceptance, - a way of suggesting that the other person is important enough to you that you are willing to spend some of your precious time on him. It is a way to say, "Hey, there are still a lot of safe, friendly people out here like me. You need not be so afraid."

Here I am just chattering away about chattering away. I hope you understand that's because I truly think you are worth the investment.

-91- Ode To The Philodendron

I love plants and flowers but can't claim to have that proverbial green thumb. My wife could grow anything! I'd bring home leaves of African violets from the floor in the plant section of supermarkets, and soon she'd have a lovely new, robust, little plant just growing its heart out for us. These days I get my plants from stores where I see those after-school-help-teen-age-boys taking care of them. I figure if they can survive that, they have some chance of surviving my care. I did try to learn about proper plant care from a book. The ends of the leaves were turning brown. The book said that was either due to over watering or under watering. A lot of help that was!!

Ode To The Philodendron

Oh, Philodendron! Praise to you!!
So hardy, strong and green.
A broken leaf is soon like new.
At my place, you are Queen!

While other flowers come and go,
You hang right in there, Pal.
At making do, you are the pro,
A classy little gal!

When I forget to water you
I never hear complaints,
And when those sunny days are few
You still act like the Saints.

You grow too long, I cut you back.
We play - you grow some more.
Survival! Yes, you have the knack.
A trooper to the core!

Most plants I have, soon meet their end.
To flower Heaven rise.
But you, my philodendron friend,
Have been one Grand Surprise!!

You're old like me, yet wrinkle-free.
No cap of silver grey.
You're secret, if revealed to me,
Would more than make my day!

On the other hand, my philodendron will never know the joy that comes from the status associated with being a senior member of ones species. On buses, younger folks offer me their seats. In grocery stores, they encourage me to take my two or three items ahead of them in the check out line. The children ask to hear how it was in the olden days (back when the Beatles were still together!!!).

So, my good friend, while praising you for your many positive characteristics, I am in some ways sad for you, that because of your eternal stamina, your life will never be as full as mine.

-92- That's Just The Way Things Are!

At an early age, I vowed that I would treat young people as though they were, indeed, intelligent beings, complete with genuine curiosity and a need to know. Although my parents were really pretty good in that department (I see now as I look back somewhat objectively), it certainly seemed to me as a child, that most everything of real interest was off limits. So many of my important questions were regularly shrugged off or met with tired platitudes.

I would answer all of my son's questions, straight away! I believe I did. At least I tried.

That's Just The Way Things Are!

There was a phrase that I would hear
When young, that went too far.
I'd ask why colds and mumps are here?
"That's just the way things are?"

I'd ask why pain and sin exist?
Why ugliness, things mar?
In answer, Parson banged his fist!
"That's just the way things are!"

Why does the rain fall from the sky?
At night, what makes a star?
And why do young folks sometimes die"
"That's just the way things are"

Just why are some such funny jokes
Yet others, only par.
You've guessed the answer I got, folks,
"That's just the way things are"

Why do the big boys kiss the girls?
Why is, so sticky, tar?
How come a clam can make us pearls?
"That's just the way things are!"

Why would they not these things address?
Why from me answers bar?
The reason, folks, I must confess,
"That's just the way things are!!!"

Somehow, the human spirit seems to be very tolerant of the absurdities, contradictions and "illogicalities" we toss at it. If it weren't, we'd not long survive. "I can't stand people who are intolerant." "Let's force everyone to become pacifists." "The principal spanked me because I hit a kid!" "I know, without any doubt, that what I believe to be Right IS right and that what you (who have a brain every bit my equal) believe to be Right IS wrong."

-93- Ode To The Moustache

It seems to me, that we only have real control over two things:
our body and our beliefs - and often not as much control over
these as we might like to think.

We can, of course, just fall into a set of beliefs or just take the
body as it naturally develops for us. On the other hand, we
can attempt to construct our own bodies and our own beliefs.
In the case of the body, many of us guys have found that all
that exercise necessary to build a body of steel, is just far more
work than we desire. We frequently, therefore, find other, less
strenuous ways of making our bodies special!

Ode To The Moustache

The moustache is a wondrous thing.
It sprouts below the nose.
Adorns the Mounty, tramp and King -
With whiskers there in rows.

When young, I wanted most of all
To grow a moustache, grand!
I asked Dad when? I got the stall!
"Must wait for active gland."

I waited patiently - til six!
But still, no fuzz would sprout.
Somehow, this problem I must fix!
I'd take another route!

When I got measles, mother made
My cousin sleep with me
So he would catch them as we laid
Together, don't you see.

So I arranged, with Gramps, to sleep.
I'd catch his moustache - sure!
But not a single "whisk" did reap!
Just snoring to endure.

When twelve, my upper lip turned dark.
A moustache soon appeared!
Since then, right there, I've let it park!
My wife, though, nixed the beard!

The set of options I faced with regard to a moustache was fairly simple - to have one (once I could) or not to have one. With beliefs, the options are seldom that simple, are they? Teens make a business out of exploring and trying out various belief options, often to the point that it becomes quite scary for us as we watch, and for them, as well, as they search.

In the old days it may have been easier because, at least in the rural areas of our country, the options were pretty slim - to be a good guy and wear a white hat or to be a bad guy and don the black one. Somewhere along the way, a lot of folks began wearing gray hats. Though intellectually stimulating, it sure muddies the water for our younger generation, doesn't it. Is it any wonder they expend so much time and energy on making their bodies and what adorns them, unique. That's much safer territory, if you ask me. I'd not mettle with it and risk pushing them into something worse.

-94- Dreamer or Doer?

Oh, I have some regrets, of course. I think most of us probably do. The things I seem to regret the most, I find, are those things I never tried. Now, I can only wonder: "Do you suppose I ever could have done that?"

I was fortunate to have been encouraged, early on, to try out and investigate and wonder about most everything that came along. It has helped me have a grand and exciting life. Not long ago, I was speaking at a retirement home, and a gentleman confessed he so wished he had learned to paint when young. He'd love to be able to do that now. Well, don't just sit there. DO IT!!

Dreamer or Doer?

An old man dreams of many things -
Of work, of love, of play.
Who knows! These things he still may bring!
Today's another day!

He dreams of families free from harm.
Wants joy to come their way.
Get Going! Use your brain and charm!
Today's another day!

He dreams of curing doubt and hate,
Confusion and dismay.
Hop to!! See what you can create!
Today's another day!

He dreams of writing books so great
They'll bring a better way.
Who Knows? Still may not be too late!
Today's another day!

He dreams of being quite content -
To paint and mold in clay.
Get going, 'fore your life is spent!
Today's another day!

I'm on a roll here! Let's attack
Those wrinkles and that gray!
I guess, in truth, with logic back,
Today is NOT that day!!!

We do have to be realistic, I suppose. I'll never run a four-minute mile. I'll never ski jump. If I'm at all sensible, I'll never again eat a half dozen chilidogs at one sitting.

But goodness sake, there are lots and lots of things left to do regardless of whether one is eighteen or eighty-eight. Each morning I make a list of the things I hope to accomplish that day. I realize that's a whole lot more organized than most folks want to be. But, maybe just a list of two or three new things for each week or month?

I had a school teacher friend who was retiring at sixty-five. He said come June first, he was going to the front porch and sit in his rocker for the entire year. The following June first, he planned to begin rocking. I thought he was joking. He wasn't. I shed a tear.

-95- Ode To The Ceiling Fan

Perhaps I'm just self-centered, or maybe it comes with the age,
or from having time, now, to contemplate strange and
wonderful, off-beat occurrences, but these days, so many
things seem to remind me of myself. If you're a regular reader
of these little books you have probably noticed that.

A friend and I were discussing this very thing not long ago.
We agreed the World just seemed filled with mirrors,
reflecting our essence, if not our image, everywhere we
looked.

Mirrors! Come to think of it, each time I look in one, quite
remarkably, it does remind me so much of myself ... !

Ode To The Ceiling Fan

Oh, Ceiling Fan! Oh, Ceiling Fan!
Good work, you do, each day.
A miracle of mod'rn man!
You ease our work and play!

So high up there, you're seldom seen.
So quiet, seldom heard.
You'd never interrupt a dream
Nor speak an unkind word.

You keep us cool in Summer, Friend,
As sun heats up our World.
In Winter, somehow, you defend
Against the cold, then hurled!

As costs go, pal, you are first rate!
A cent a day, I hear!
(Well, that was back in thirty-eight -
A nickel, now, I fear!)

Dependable! Could not want more!
For months on end you turn.
Few folks I know, complete their chore
As well as you, I've learned!

My ceiling fan has been right here
Since nineteen thirty-three.
We're much alike, it now appears.
Both slow but sure, you see!

All my life I've been what you might call a plodder. I was never the fastest at anything, but I had endurance. I could outlast most anyone at most any activity. I could run forever, dance all night, keep swimming into next week.

So, I suppose I've always been sort of slow but sure just by nature. I guess if it worked so well all my life, I shouldn't look down on it at this point. That probably makes slowing down easier for me than for all you folks who were used to coming in first all your life. At least you had the chance to come in first and that must be a wonder-filled memory.

-96- Patterns For Life

As you know, I seldom take things terribly seriously. I'm always looking for that bright, funny, off-beat side of what I see and hear. Most of all, I certainly don't take either my own accomplishments or blunders seriously. Oh, I try to learn and grow from them, but neither inflates nor deflates me for long. There is, however, one thing that I do take very seriously, and that is the raising of our precious children. It is so wonderful that, over the years, we have amassed the knowledge necessary to know just how to help children grow into happy, stable, productive people. It is so sad, that so many fail to use or even investigate that knowledge.

Patterns For Life

The scared guys wince. The tough guys hit.
The sad guys cry real tears.
The bad guys steal. Depressed guys sit.
The Peeping Tom just leers.

The hypochondriac feels bad.
The paranoid can't trust.
The Pollyanna's never sad?
The losers all go bust!

The nice guys help! The good guys grin!
Philanthropists disburse.
The clowns bring cheer! The priest fights sin.
Hard workers come in first.

It seems that once we've learned our roles
They're very hard to shed.
We seem to live by their controls
From youth, 'til we're quite dead!

It's sobering to think that one
Is cast into his mold
Before his first six years are done -
But that is true, I'm told!

So seems most crucial that we each
Learn steps that will prepare
Each little one we get to teach,
To love and trust and care!!!!

One's golden years provide a rare
New chance where e'er we go,
To teach our love and trust and care
To all the kids we know.

Not long ago I saw a tiny little barn - skinny, red roofed,
wide-eyed and with a gleam in its eye (the one with a single
remaining pane). It reminded me of children - well of me as a
skinny little, red-headed, eager child, knowing that I had to
someday take on the World but at that moment not at all ready
to leave the safe and comfortable confines of my yard.

May we be ever mindful of those around us (regardless of
their age) who need one of the talents we have to offer them.
We all have something.

With love and best wishes, I remain,
Grampa Gray