

Loves,
Laughs
&
Losses

Poems and Sketches
By
Carol LoCastro

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On Turning 60

There was my article, at the end of the June issue of *Women's Teaching*. Mine was the last, I realized, because Stacey put the articles in order by age of the author. Me? The oldest? How could that be? I thought of a line from the song Sunrise, Sunset in *Fiddler on the Roof*: "I don't remember growing older...."

Next to the title of the article were my name and the number 60. Surprise and shock. Yes, I'd just turned 60 but this was the first time I'd seen that number associated with my name. In print, for the entire world to see. The truth was out.

And since truth and honesty are what this publication is all about, I plan to be absolutely honest in my reflexions on turning 60. What follows may not be the positive message that younger people hope for, but it is genuine.

Throughout my life, I've always looked forward to and celebrated my birthdays. Until my fortieth. On that birthday, I looked at the clock on the wall and realized that I was powerless to stop the passage of time. I felt an unexpected urge to kill the clock, to grab a hammer and smash it to little tiny, irreparable bits. But, I also knew that it wouldn't help.

At age 50, I threw myself a big party with entertainment, food and lots of friends. It was my way of giving the finger to Father Time, defying him to rob me of happiness, saying to him, "I don't care if I'm half a century old. I'm still feeling good and I'm still going to live my life with gusto".

This year, about a month before my birthday, I wasn't sure how or if I wanted to

celebrate. I even considered not telling anyone, thinking that maybe I could pretend it wasn't happening.

When my friend Ann found out that I was turning 60, she cheerfully announced, "Oh, now you can get 10% off at Simple Foods on Wednesdays!" Since their prices are high and I shop there often, I welcomed the news. Discounts do help the transition to the "60 and over" category. However, a day after I shopped at Simple Foods and enjoyed my discount, I made my biannual visit to the dental hygienist. During the cleaning, Marianne explained to me that enamel becomes more brittle with age, so I shouldn't eat ice cubes or hard nuts. Great, I thought, one more part of my body that is slowly disintegrating.

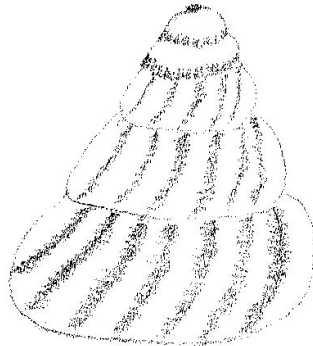
Two weeks ago, I fell off my bike onto my side and felt my back go "ping". It's still not normal. But then, what is normal for a 60 year old woman? I guess I have to redefine what normal is. Normal now seems to include: the necessity of consuming at least 40 grams of fiber every day, taking two poles with me on a hike, wearing a bra with an under wire to hold up a couple of shrinking, sagging breasts, getting numerous aging spots on my back checked once a year to make sure they are not skin cancer, deciding whether or not to hide the grey, writing everything down on paper because I can't trust my memory any more, using KY jelly, getting a new prescription for reading glasses every year and not staying on the computer for more than 15 minutes a day, walking or doing other weight bearing exercise every day to ward off osteoporosis, wearing slacks with an elastic waistband to accommodate an expanded waistline, doing crosswords in an attempt to avoid Alzheimer's, and

hearing about yet another friend's death due to cancer. And the list will grow, I'm sure.

Although I'm not planning my memorial service or deciding where I want my ashes scattered yet, turning 60 has brought me closer to those thoughts. The knowledge that I have less time has made me more thoughtful about how I spend my time. On any given day, I might ask myself, should I bake oatmeal raisin cookies for my husband, read Thich Nhat Hanh, volunteer at the Columbine Manor, get a massage, attend a vigil for victims of the Iraq War, or hold the hand of a distraught friend? What's the best use of my time? Is there something I always wanted to accomplish that I haven't done yet? I also ask myself, how do I want people to remember me? I already know the answer to that question: I want them to say that I was honest and compassionate and, most of all that I could laugh at myself.

Carol LoCastro

June, 2007



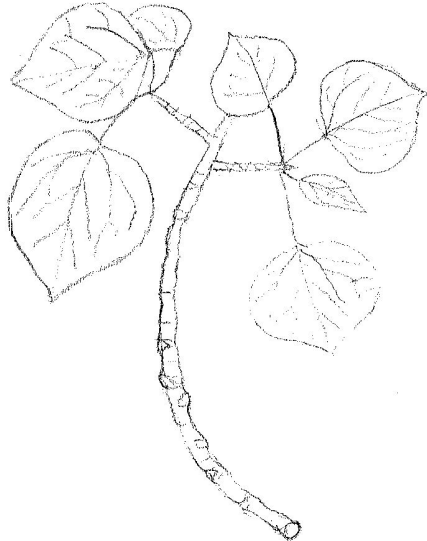
Me

One by One

One by one they've magically disappeared.
One pearl earring, a favorite tea cup,
pink flamingo from the front yard,
the summer of sixty six.

Virginity and innocence lost at senior prom,
sense of invincibility vanished at thirty,
belief in limitless possibilities at sixty,
inexhaustible energy a thing of the past.

Sorrow gives way to humility,
emptying prepares room for compassion
as loss pries open the reluctant heart.
Clinging to nothing, discoveries abound.



Aspen branch near Bonanza
Aug 16 2005

Love Song To My Feet

Since first standing upright, pushing against the pull
of gravity,
gingerly balancing on tips of lower extremities
to free a hand outstretched towards
that chocolate chip cookie on the Formica counter
top,
my precious feet have served me well.

These two curious appendages
propelled me at astounding speed across
soft green grass in Roosevelt Park to win
every race at the annual Barbers' Union Picnic,
shimmied me up the mulberry tree and put my
greedy fingers
within reach of black bombs of sweetness at the top,
left tracks in blistering sand of Seaside all those
too short summer vacations,
ended up cold and wet from leaks in rubber
galoshes that
couldn't resist the forbidden puddles after a heavy
downpour.

Balancing on the pitching deck of a 32 footer in the
Caribbean,
skiing across a powdery mountain meadow near
Frazier,
scaling a granite rock face in the Schwangunks,
pushing down bicycle pedals on the Cherry Creek
bike path,
hiking over giant fern leaf-strewn trails in Able
Tasman,
they were on duty. Unpaid. Trusty feet.

Dance. Can't forget dance. Not ballet that leaves

your feet bloodied from being crammed into pointed shoes.

Modern. Bare feet let you feel cool, smooth wood floors below.

Folk, square, contra, ballroom, Sufi, African, country western swing.

Never have my feet complained, screaming "Stop, I can't take it!"

What a marvel, the foot,
with its 28 bones and plantigrade form.

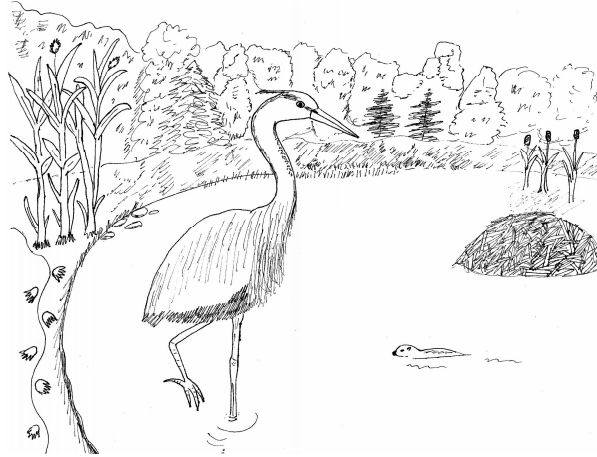
Fools, the Arabs and Buddhists who pay it no respect.

Sadists, the traditional Chinese, who broke and bound it to make women submissive.

Even I have been guilty of taking for granted its gift,

undervaluing it like stale bread, mistreating it like a spurned lover.

Till now. Now the foot ranks high
on my list of cherished body parts
and I vow to carry my message far and wide:
All bipeds alive, have you hugged your feet today?



Not Just A Big Nose

It isn't just a big nose
my Sicilian father passed on to me
nor year round skin the color
of crispy crust of good Italian bread
that turns espresso under summer sun,
nor curly black locks
the envy of all straight haired blonds.

No, it's the seldom appreciated talents
like spinning pennies
or finding a coin behind a kid's ear,
folding a paper dollar into a finger ring,
folding a cloth table napkin into a ball,
or hiding a pea in a bowl of raspberry sherbet,
shuffling a deck of cards without sending them
flying,
shooting watermelon seeds into a waiting mouth,
baiting a fish hook with a squirmy worm,
hooking and landing a bluefish
in a charter boat off the Atlantic coast.
Like throwing a softball boy style,
carrying a tune,
saving money,
planting a seed and watching it grow,
finding an edible mushroom in the woods,
breaking with a rock an empty beer bottle
balanced on a railroad track,
telling a joke and remembering the punch line,
treating the grocery store cashier like a real person,
appreciating a good meal followed by a nap
on a Sunday afternoon.

Parchesi

Win or lose.
Crucial difference
to a kid.
To adults
not so much
you'd think.
Boxes litter the floor
filled with parents'
final possessions.
Sister Deb and I sift,
purge, divide.
This silverware, I take.
That lamp, she takes.
Monopoly goes to Goodwill.
What about Parchesi?
Let's play, I chirp.
Lighten the mood.
We play.
Competition fierce.
I win.
Fury flares.
Deb's anger a shock and surprise.
A game is seldom
just a game.
Old wounds open,
egos bruise,
egos gloat,
sense of control erodes.
Initial elation of victory
sours, sickens victor.
Defeat digs its talons
deep into soft belly
of worthiness.

Piccolina

From the moment Mom gave a final push
and out popped a baby girl with a head
full of thick, black, wavy hair and a big nose,
it was obvious I would favor Dad's side of the
family.

I was nicknamed Piccolina, the little one.
I cut my teeth on hard crusty bread,
was weaned on pasta swimming
in olive oil and garlic.
When ill, it was hot red wine
that cured me, not Tylenol.
The lullaby sure to
send me to dreamland was
O Sole Mio, not Rock a Bye Baby.

Mother called me headstrong
for my stubborn nature.
Just like my Sicilian ancestors
who held firmly to their culture
in self defense against a string of
conquering nations over centuries.
Perhaps Dad's hatred of his in-laws harkened
back to the Normans' invasion of Sicily.

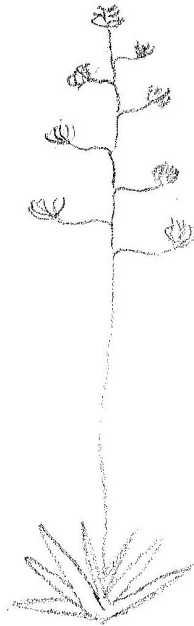
None of the cool reserve of Mother's
British blood line informed my behavior.
Quick to cry or anger at my older sister's
teasing, I could also exult
in a moment of exhilaration.

Hand gestures came naturally to me.
With a flick of fingers from under the chin
or pinching of fingers together moving up and down

in the center of the body,
I could signal “You expect me to believe *that?*”
“Back off,” or “Not on your life.”

Exposed to the sun for less than
the time it takes to say Mama Mia,
my skin turned the color of espresso coffee,
a tad darker than its normal cappuccino hue.

So when it’s time for me to depart this world,
sing me a chorus of Arrivederci Roma,
serve me a glass of hot Chianti
and tuck me in for the long gondola ride.



Century plant - SW NM
Dec '05

Post Depression Era Poverty Mentality Disorder

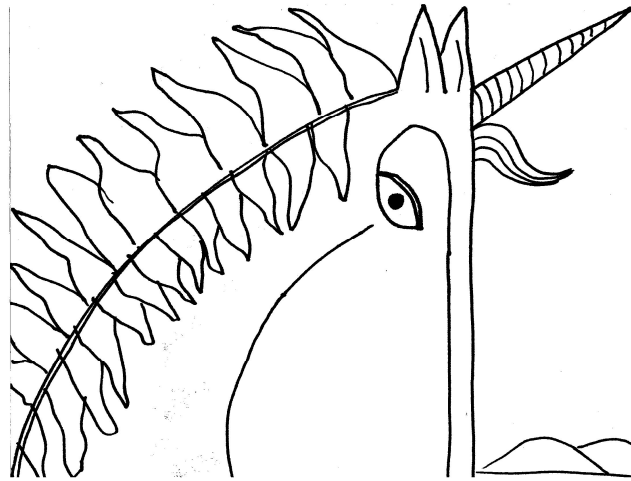
Scrape, scrimp, penny-pinch
Save, save, save.
Depression era customs
Insinuate themselves like pesky mosquitoes,
Influence my choices,
Instill fear of spending,
Guilt if I do.

Mom got tired of the old stove.
Dad gave it a paint job, kind of.
Dad got tired of the old chair.
Mom reupholstered it out of mohair.
Mom gave Dad another flannel shirt.
Dad wore the one faded, color of dirt.
Dad gave Mom a new blouse with frills.
It's wrapped and in the closet still.

Ma, these new blue jeans are too big.
The waist is up to my chin.
Stop complaining, you'll grow into them.
Ma, I'm hungry, what's to eat?
Close the refrigerator door, you're wasting energy.
Ma, we're out of toilet paper.
I just bought some. Who's using it all?
Ma, I'm not hungry.
Somebody needs to finish the broccoli.
I'm not throwing it away.
Money doesn't grow on trees, you know.

Saks Fifth Avenue, William Sonoma somehow pale
Compared to thrift stores and yard sales.
Guess what I paid for this little deal?
No, you're kidding. What a steal!

Why buy new
when old will do?
Squeeze another year out of that
table lamp, throw rug, radio, TV set.
A penny saved is a penny earned
The globe is warming, haven't you heard?
Reduce, reuse, recycle.
Been doing that since I was a trifle.
It's back in style.
Just had to wait a while.



Responsibility

I really should get up
and do something.
But there's a cat
on my lap.

The rug needs to
be vacuumed,
dishes washed.
But the cat
on my lap is sleeping.

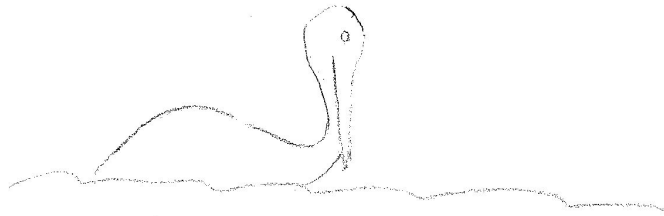
Bills need to be
paid, emails responded to.
But the cat
on my lap doesn't
want to be disturbed.

If I don't get these tasks
done, I'll feel like
a lazy bum.
But the purring cat
is warm in my lap.

What could I say to him?
How could I possibly
justify such a rude
intrusion on his
tranquility
and on my sweet respite
from responsibility?

Restaurant #1

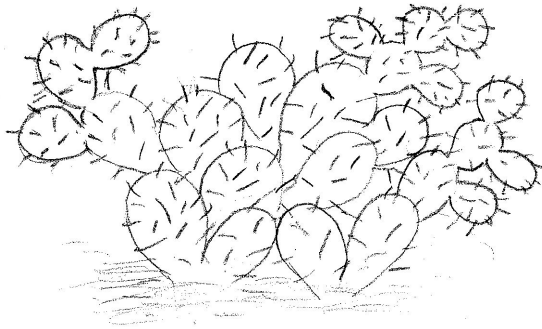
Lights on. Little feet scurry to hide.
Sips of black coffee
and smell of Pine Sol
snap brain awake.
“Ordering,” shouts cute thing
in starched uniform and hairnet.
“Eggs over easy, side sausage.”
Sizzle, sizzle go eggs on
oiled stainless steel slab.
Hairy hand maneuvers spatula
under eggs, over sausage.
Flip, flip, roll, roll.
Errant sausage hits tile floor.
Reappears on plate.
“Pick up your order, Sweetheart.”
Like freight train gaining speed,
orders come faster and faster.
Customers impatient, waitress irritated,
Cook tired and hungry.
Puerto Rican dishwashers
break out into
“Que Bonita Bandera”
Good morning, Manhattan.



Brown Pelican, Kings Bay, Sea of Cortez

Restaurant #2

Lights on. Little feet bounce downstairs.
Smell of coffee percolating permeates.
Cheerios box comes out of cupboard.
Cute things sit at Formica table
with stainless steel legs,
gobble little o's from bowl.
"You kids go outside and play."
Slap, slap goes screen door.
Vigilant eyes watch child on trike
Out window over enamel sink.
Slap, slap goes screen door.
Blood from scraped knee
drips on clean linoleum floor.
Bandaid and butter cookie
curb crocodile crying.
"Help me make spaghetti sauce."
Ball jar of tomatoes put up last fall
comes out of pantry.
Garlic, basil, oregano, red wine
go into four quart pot.
Five fit around table dressed up
Checkered table cloth
Bottle of Chianti.
Buon appetito.

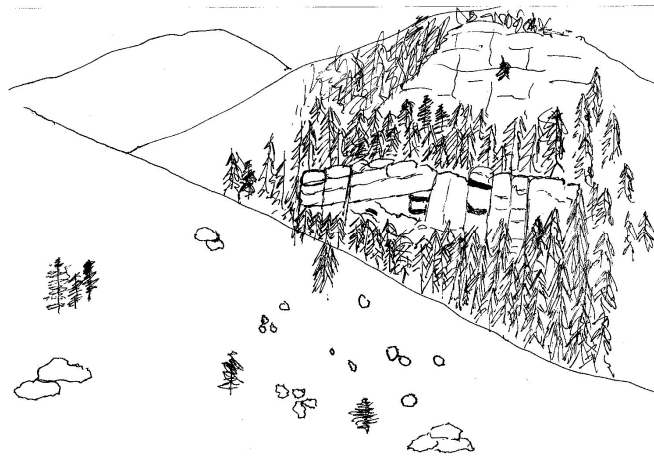


Sunday Walks

Sunday walks in Jersey woods
in search of wild edible plants and mushrooms,
target practice with rocks and discarded beer bottles
perched on abandoned railroad tracks,
fishing trips on the Atlantic and Lake Champlain
train us to bait hooks and balance
in rocking wooden row boats,
music lessons around kitchen table after dinner,
Dad strumming, us singing *Down by the Old Mill
Stream*,
baby sparrow fallen from nest,
rescued, adopted as household pet
and nurtured to adulthood,
UNION SHOP sign hangs proudly
for forty years next to white barber's coat,
even a refusal to let us have hula hoops
when all the other kids had them.
"If everyone jumped off the bridge,
would you follow them?"
Even that teaching, hated though it was,
made me who I am.

I savor strolls in open spaces far from roads,
where I roam searching for
animal remains, wild flowers, hawk feathers,
nibbling on bitter juniper berries
and sucking on rose hips in fall.
I've thrown, hit or kicked volleyballs, basketballs,
softballs and soccer balls in courts and on fields.
Like metal to magnet, I'm drawn to music.
In choir singing songs that
lift hearts, soothe pain, create community.
At home, plucking autoharp, crooning
You are My Sunshine or Five Foot Two.

Birds fly in and feather my nest-
Dusky flycatchers, rock wrens, cactus wrens,
curved billed thrashers sing and lesser gold finches
yank seeds from sunflowers
upside down outside bedroom window.
A teachers' union lapel pin identifies me
as fierce defender of workers' rights,
picket line walker when necessary.
Down to black hair and big nose,
stubborn streak and hot temper,
evidence of ancestry
unequivocal and irreversible.
Much appreciated.



Years From Now

Years from now, if the neurons in my neocortex
cease to form new connections
and I can't remember what I just said,
may my hippocampus help me retrieve
from the archives of my mind
these selections from my early history:

I swing by my skinned knees
from the apple tree branch
that straddles the sidewalk leading to the
chicken coop club house in our backyard
and spit watermelon seeds at my sister
on a sticky Jersey summer night
to get back at her for tying me up
to the clothes pole and leaving me there
for the lions.

I run to catch the ball
that drops into the backyard brick BBQ
and busts open my forehead,
taste blood drip into my mouth,
see my mother's horrified expression,
sit between the EMTs in the cab of the ambulance,
who treat me to the first and last
triple dip ice cream cone of my life
after the doc makes a crosshatch stitch on my
forehead.

I sing Five Foot Two, Eyes of Blue
to Dad's guitar cords in the big kitchen
while the blue crabs we pulled out of Barnegat Bay
earlier that day
try to claw their way out of the pot of boiling water
and save themselves from my insatiable appetite.

I sit at the dining room table with the lipped edge
on the HMS Queen Mary with my father
and watch our bowls of turtle soup slide
back and forth, back and forth
as the swells of the Atlantic Ocean
heave the ocean liner
and banish the rest of our family to their berths.

I perch on the bus seat next to Sue
who plays forward
with the rest of the Metuchen High School
Girls' Basketball Team
returning from a victorious out of town game,
as we ride past the gigantic, mortifying
sign that reads, "MODESS..... Because"
and we all shout in unison, "You can't use a cork!"

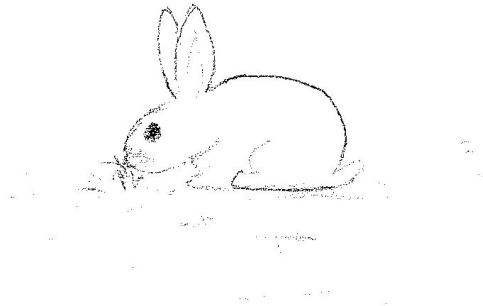
I sneak out of the women's dorm at midnight,
slide in close to my boyfriend Pete in his VW bug,
ride over to the nearby swamp,
park, get out, pull on black rubber hip boots,
grab a flashlight and a bucket,
and join the rest of the ecology grad students
in their labors to catch and study
the threatened Raritan ribbed toad.

I take the student charter flight
for the first plane trip of my life,
stagger off at Gatwick at two am,
drunk from the free in-flight champagne,
and embark on my three month solo
hitchhiking tour of Europe,
subsisting on wine, bread, cheese and fruit,
madly in love with life.

Spirit

If I Come Back

If I come back in another form
let it be as a humble dandelion seed
that flies up into the sky,
around homes, kids, bicycles,
ice cream cones, and is blown,
lifted by the wind
placed, pouf, on grass
in a lush horse pasture,
where it is planted, makes
a plant, then flowers
loved by bumble bees,
later eaten by a stray goat
whose poop is scooped up
and dropped into a vegetable garden
where spinach is planted and
eaten by a girl who grows up
to be president of the most powerful
nation in the world, who decides
to end, once and for all,
greed and fear,
war.



Proper Lake State Park, Safford, Ariz.

La Virgen

La Virgen de Guadalupe clings to my moist chest
providing comfort and compassion,
an ear to hear my desires, my fears.
No importa where or when or what is happening,
she is with me. Gracias a Dios.

Los sabados, at el Mercado,
abuela grips my slender hand in her wrinkled
plump one, both the color of canela,
and gently guides me along
endless passageways of stands gorged
with goods: mango, papaya,
aguacate, calabacitas, cilantro, chapulines con chili,
carne, pollo, pescado, queso y pan.
Smack dab in the center
of the smells and sights
La Virgen graces an altar lit with
blinking Christmas lights,
her porcelain hands outstretched in benediction
towards calcetines, ropa, vestidos,
hasta calzones. Que verguenza!
Virgencita, may I have a piñata today?
The piñatas come into view,
hanging by bent coat hangers from the rafters,
shaped like Raton Micky,
Pato Donald, Bart Simpson, La Princessa.
Pero, que pena! All I get to take home are
stale cacahuates. Ay, Chihuahua!

Los domingos, Mama combs and pulls back
my long black pelo, snaps on a barrette
so tight that my eyes water and turn Chinese
and I get dolor de cabeza.
Over my head goes big sister's

old dress that used to fit me too loose,
now too tight, pero ni modo. Sirve.
Off to la misa we go – mama, papa, abuela,
mis hermanos Gordo, Flaco, Chico,
Esperanza, Estrella, y Inocencia.
Inside the cool incense infused air of la cathedral,
La Virgen receives our supplications
and tears, and sends us back out
into a sweet capricious world.

As is the custom after mass, we stroll around the
zocalo,
to stretch our legs cramped from kneeling.
Vendedores hawk their wares.
Gigantic tubular balloons that soar up twelve feet
high.
Paletas in tropical fruit flavors-
pina, coco, tamarindo, y mango, mi favorito.
Corn on the cob on a stick,
Elotes, smeared with mayonnaise, crumpled cheese,
chili powder and lime juice make your lips say
Ooooooo. Quezeditas, tamales, tacos, jugo.
Little kids chase each other or pigeons
around in circles as parents, grandparents,
uncles and aunts sit on steel benches
and gossip. Teenagers flirt, giggle, and show off,
saying things like he's so feo or
check out those chichis. Dios mio!
I kiss La Virgen and thank her for
not letting me be a teenager.

Mas tarde, we all cram into the truck,
adults in the cab and kids in the bed,
girls sitting down, macho boys standing up.
Off to aire fresco in the campo for a picnic.
Ay caramba! The truck breaks down.

La Virgen that dangles from
the rearview mirror must be off duty.
All pile out. Men prop up the hood, stare, tinker.
Women chat, kids throw stones at glass bottles,
pick, pop into hungry mouths garambullos,
tiny round fruit poking out from roadside cactus
plants.
We'll picnic right here, decide the women.
Maybe we'll get back home by sunset.
Si Dios quiere, I whisper to la Virgen
floating above my heart. Si Dios quiere.



Listening

In last moments of moon light,
listening.

Listening to pre-dawn sounds
of Mexican town:
roosters' call and response,
dogs' call and response,
church bells' clang, clang, clang.

With dawn,
roosters quiet,
dogs quiet,
faithful sit in pews,
murmur Maria full of grace,
make the sign of the cross,
kiss the rosary,
listen for a voice from on high
to know that someone hears
their supplications
in this capricious world.



Mobius Strip

Dawn sneaks over window sill
like a cat stalks a sparrow
stealthily, gaining ground gradually
so as not to alarm.

A new day arrives
granting us another chance
to begin again
to practice gratitude for our lives,
forgiveness of self as well as others,
bring fear and doubt
screaming to their calloused knees.
befriend loss,
cradle uncertainty
in our capable arms.

I sit
observing the breath
at the tip of my nose
moving in and out, in and out
reminiscent of ocean's ebb and flow
in a simple yet profound rhythm.

Life is a Mobius strip.
There's really only one side.
Beginnings meld into endings
and endings empty into
new beginnings
in one continuous
mystery soaked drama.

Twilight seeps through curtain layers,
an exotic perfume that saturates
our senses and

leaves us dreamy eyed.

Another day is done.
Another day will come.
Over and over again.



Morning

Morning arrives on her
rosy slippers, padding across the
sky. The full moon fades. From
the back door my feet
step out onto sandy soil and angle
up into pinon studded hills.

My eyes focus down to avoid dangers –
cacti, sharp rocks, burrows – and to look
for clues of creatures that wandered
about while I tried in vain to sleep.

The coyotes were out in force, yowling,
drunk from milk light illuminating
familiar routes. Paw prints
and scat litter the path. Spring
spawned new pups.

A garden of mule deer must have sprung
up overnight, grazed on creamy
Yucca blossom petals, cautious
as they slipped through the silent
summer night air.

I recognize tracks of small four-toed
kangaroo rats who sneak
out of underground burrows nightly,
stuff seeds into cheek pouches and foot drum
warnings to kin
at any whiff of predator.

I head back to the house for breakfast
although already satisfied deeper
than food can satisfy. My eyes focus down

and I pass my foot prints going out. If
you didn't know who made those tracks
would you guess that her heart was lifted this
gloriously ordinary morning? That for an instant she
held
a thimble of wildness in her fiery palm?



On The Prowl

Flash of fur.
Pointed ears ending in wispy tufts.
Black stripes circling tail.
A leap onto patio wall
like a dandelion seed
floating up into sky.
Eyes green as ocotillo
leaves in early spring
scan.

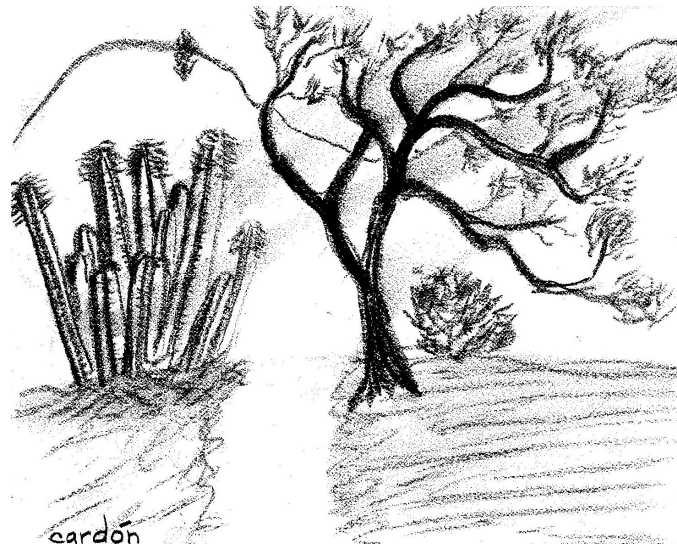
Camera in hand,
I hasten outside
to shadow a bobcat
on the prowl.

Each bush a potential harbor,
a target of investigation.
He checks them out
one by one,
like a child at an Easter egg hunt,
moving methodically along
before settling on a lantana
and sinking to the ground
to wait.

Four paws lift off the ground,
then plunge.
A brief screech stabs the air.
Dangling feebly
from the bobcat's jaw,
the rabbit jerks its soft, innocent body
to and fro in a futile attempt
to live.

A few yards away,
at the base of a mesquite tree,
the feast begins, starting with the head,
until only a gentle white puff of a tail
remains.

Pocketing my camera,
I drift back home,
contemplating existence
and what to have for dinner.



Seeds

A Lesser Goldfinch hangs upside down
and yanks out sunflower seeds.

From the stem, it dangles like a clown
And yanks out sunflower seeds.

The seeds hide inside the yellow crown.
The cat hides underneath the weeds.

A Lesser Goldfinch hangs upside down
and yanks out sunflower seeds.



Sonoran Winter

Snow. No.
No sign of it here
in the Sonoran desert
except at the pointy tops
of the Santa Rita mountains
to the east and the Catalinas
to the north. I know you are
thinking what do you expect?

I miss it.
The excitement of seeing
first flakes of season
float down as if angels
are having a pillow fight.
What fun they must have
whacking each other carefully
to avoid breaking those feathery
wings and glittery halos.

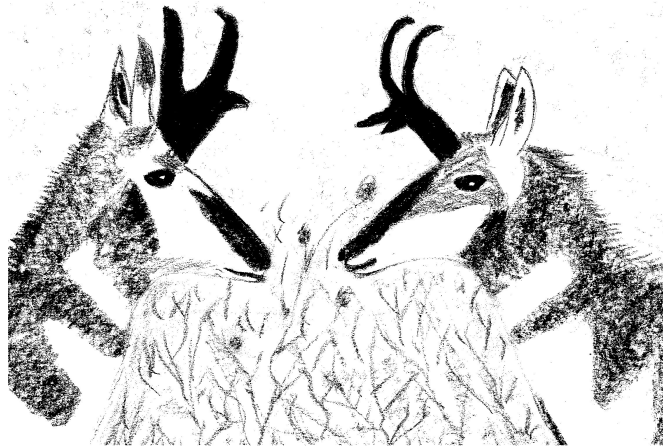
I miss watching a landscape
transformed, edges of everything
softened, offering sights that
force us to pause
in awe of such beauty.
The swish, swish sound of
cross country skis sliding
along a track through a forest
silenced by snow, a cathedral
after all the worshippers have left.

Summer In Colorado

Claret cup cacti
Flash their color against quartz,
Me, drunk from redness

Noon in a meadow
Slight breeze on green aspen leaves
Small soft tinkle sound

Hummingbirds hover
For no more than a second
Then zing off again.



White

After a doctor appointment
Before returning home
I make a detour to see
A local landmark.

A man with thick snowy white hair
pushes a stroller across
brown adobe bricks of the plaza in front
of historic Mission San Xavier
south of Tucson.

What a kind grandfather, I think,
helping a young family watch
over the baby while adults tour
white walled church.

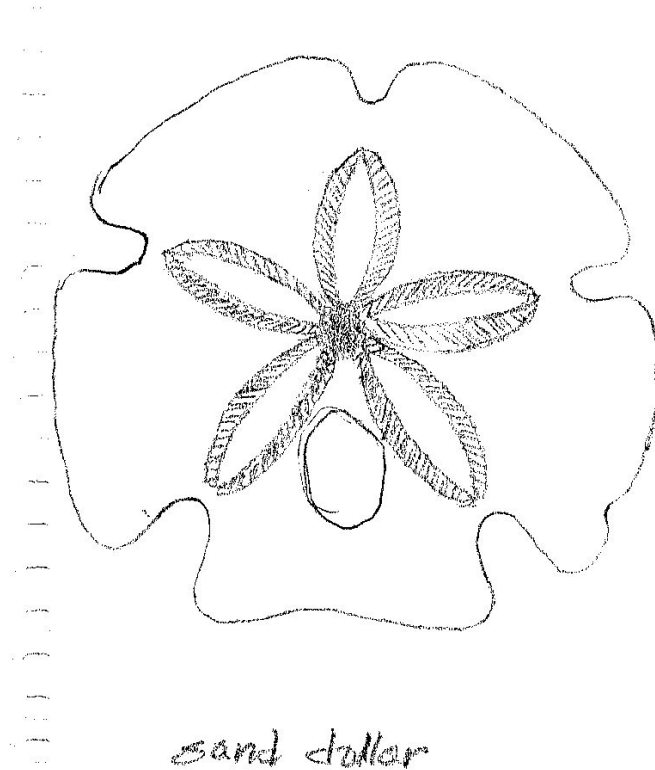
As I pass him, I glance into
the stroller, hoping to glimpse
a cute little baby, a coveted sight in
my over 55 retirement community.

Instead, I see a small, sickly, scar
faced dog with matted white
fur wearily looking out
at the world.

Did its white haired owner, by
lighting a candle, whispering a
prayer in this sacred place, hope
for a cure or just a gentler
passage for his beloved pet?

Doing a small thing with great
love, he magnifies the impact

of my visit. Right then and there,
I have an epiphany. I decide that
being a dog in the care of
this white haired old man
might be all the heaven
I could ever need.

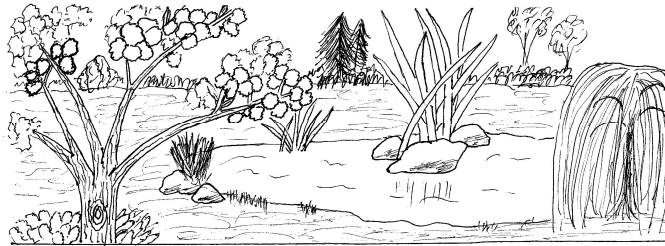


sand dollar

Wind

Could I ever learn to love wind?
Wind: tormentor turned lover
would read my journal heading.
Impossible, improbable murmurs
my mind. But still, I wonder...

Wind, I would whisper
in its silken ears,
I love you.
Carry me away to far off lands
in your soft, strong arms.
Mold me like sand
into mountains
and valleys.
Caress me with your
feathery lips.
Muss up my hair.
Rip off my clothes.
Whip around my loins.
Lick my skin dry
till I plead for you to stop.
Whip me into a frenzy.
Shake me to my core.
Then lay me down to rest
as you settle into stillness.



Loves

Domestic Bliss And Mundane Shit

Good morning, Sweetie. How did you sleep?
I slept well, darling. How about you?

Oh, hell, you forgot to set the alarm clock!
Me? I reminded you to set it last night.

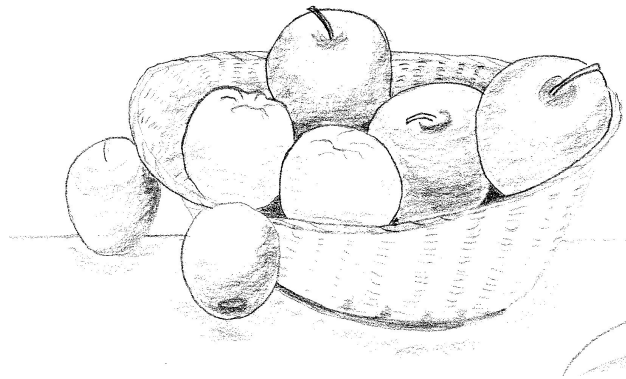
It's OK. I'll just be late for the meeting. Breakfast?
Yes, breakfast! Eggs and toast or oatmeal?

I'll do my toast. You always leave it in too long.
I'll do my eggs. You never cook them long enough.

Bye, Sweetie. Be home about five. Love you.
Love you, too. Cum'eer and give your sugar a little
kiss.

Damn. Why did you put the trash in front of the
door?
Because if I didn't you wouldn't remember to take
it out.

Love ya.
Love ya.



Marriage should ripen like a tomato

Marriage should ripen like
a tomato during hot summer months:
start passionately green,
bask in wordless warmth,
grow generous,
plump up with sweetness,
feed mouths hungry for satisfaction.

It should know a fecundity of kind
gestures, tender touch
over tea and ripe
strawberries in porcelain bowls
on screened in porches at sunset.

But it often does not.

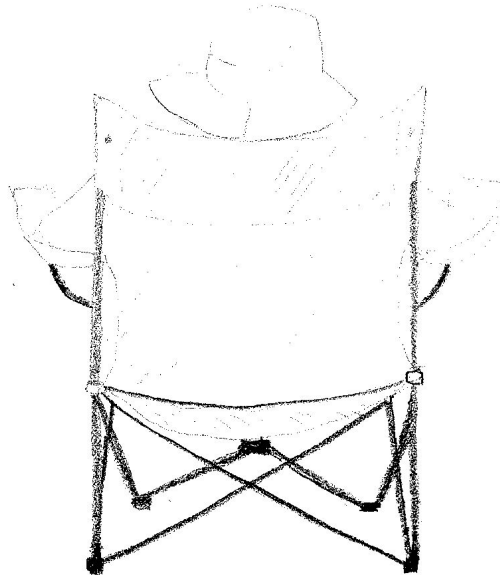
Instead it proceeds like a tree.
Some years it struggles for water
and barely survives a searing blaze.
It stands in thickets of
accusations thrown about
and caustic words carelessly
left on the kitchen table at night.

The wash, weeds,
and dirty dishes piling up,
smother sparks
of caring and compassion
that once softened the sheets.

Needs

I over hear my husband in the bedroom
speaking softly to her.
You like that, don't you?
he asks in a sweet tone
he seldom uses with me.

I barge in on them.
He is gently stroking
her flat belly. She is on her back
with her legs spread wide,
purring loudly, eyes closed,
obviously in ecstasy.



Steven - Bartlett Wash - Aq. 4, 2004

Overheard On Flight #284

Do you love me?
We've been married for forty years.
Forty years. Can you believe that?
You better love me
'cause I'm all you've got.

Normally private words
now public in hushed
confines of plane cabin.

Fellow passengers pretend
to not hear this raw confession
of insecurity,
squirm in seats.

Wife, perhaps wisely
not waiting for answer,
continues chatting to
silent husband.

Through my mind blares
Beatles singing
When I'm sixty four.
We all wonder at times.

Finally, I get up, go
Over to her seat,
share with her
what Pema Chodron
said: ABANDON HOPE.

Husband gets up, goes
to restroom. Never comes out.

Reaction To The Beatles' "We Can Work It Out"

Try to see it my way.

OK, no garlic in the spaghetti sauce.

Do I have to keep on talking till I can't go on?

No, you could stop right now and let me talk!

*While you see it your way, run the risk of knowing
that our love may soon be gone.*

Is that a threat?

We can work it out, we can work it out.

Your use of the word "we" gives me hope.

Think of what you're saying.

What do you think I'm saying? Could you
paraphrase, please.

You can get it wrong and still you think it's alright.

Our therapist said we shouldn't use words like
"right" and wrong".

*Think of what you're saying, we can work it out and
get it straight, I'll say goodnight.*

You're leaving? I don't feel a sense of closure.

We can work it out, we can work it out.

I hope so, I hope so.

*Life is very short and there's no time for fussing and
fighting, my friend.*

We're communicating, not "fussing" and
"fighting".

*I have always thought that it's a crime, so I will ask
you once again.*

What's a crime? Taking time to communicate?

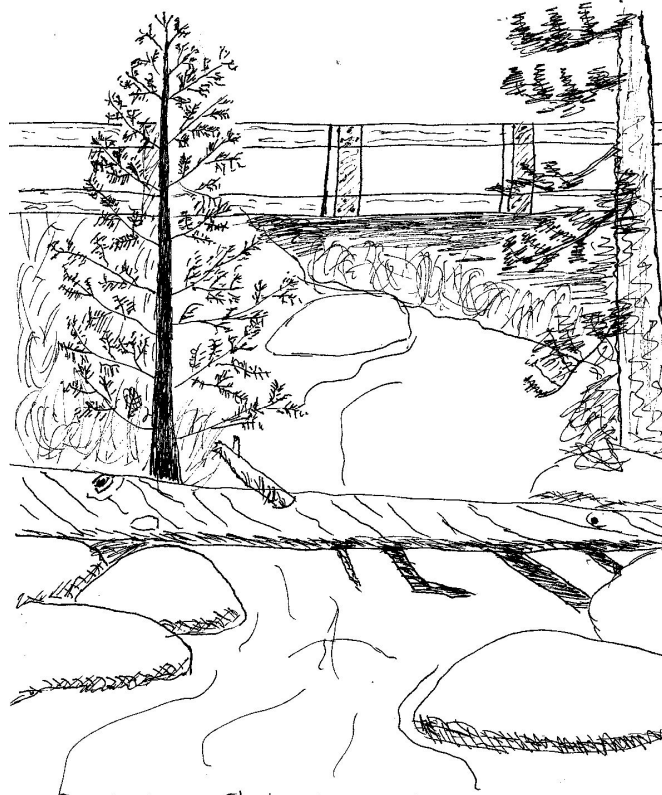
Try to see it my way.

OK, we vacation in Little Rock instead of Paris.

Only time will tell if I am right or I am wrong.

There you go again with black and white thinking.

*While you see it your way, there's a chance that we
might fall apart before too long.
So, it would be my fault if we split up?
We can work it out, we can work it out.
Don't think twice. Cause it ain't me, babe. No, no,
no.....*



Sand Creek, Shoshone Nat. Forest, Wyo. July 13 2008

Rings

First one came from high school
freshman year fling.
Dangling from chain around my neck,
it proved I was desirable
for a week.

Next one was from Father.
Silver and turquoise Navajo
souvenir from Grand Canyon
made me feel special
for a change.

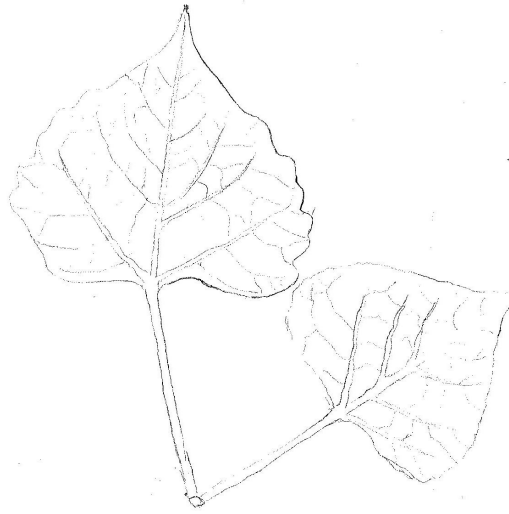
We should make it legal, he declared
after months of living together.
Down to the courthouse we went.
No wedding band appeared. Bought one myself
for twenty five dollars.

My next live in boyfriend
had one made for me
after only ten years together.
Lost it two years later,
foreshadowing a split-up.

I knew I had a keeper
when Steven bought me
a ring on our sixth date.
Twelve years and twenty rings later,
forever rings true.

The Truth

How can I tell my husband the truth? That I honestly hate to eat the trout he spends all day toiling to hook and brings home proudly like husbands of old who hunted to keep the family from starving. That I am in mortal fear of all those tiny bones hidden in the flesh ready to choke me till I'm blue in the face and have to dial 911 between gags. How I detest the smell of fish in the kitchen, mixed with odors of detergent and garlic, making me wish I were roaming the Rose Collection at the Denver Botanic Gardens. How fish are so beautiful, especially the brookies with their camouflage coloration that I'm in awe of nature's cleverness and mourn the death of such a marvelous creature as it lays limp in the grey sink. What I can tell my husband is that I adore him in spite of my hatred of the fish he brings home. And, believe me, that's the truth.



Cottonwood leaves - Barlette Wash, Moab

Through The Years In Song

Sitting around formica kitchen table
Dad strumming Gibson
Mom and kids chiming in
“Let Me Call You Sweetheart”
Suggests hints of a sweet romance
before marriage and offspring.

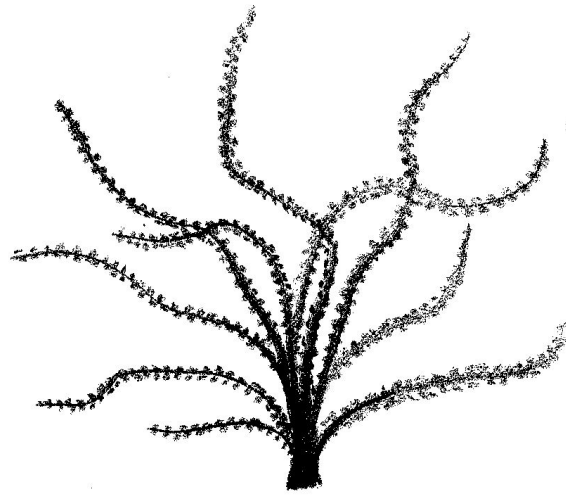
Squatting on dorm floor
listening late into lonely night
Suzanne takes me down
to a place of puzzlement and enchantment
where elephants might fly
and ducks gallop

Lying on warm carpeted floor
in pricey Princeton rental
Being fed tiny sips of Drambuie
by PhD boyfriend, soon to be husband
with Janice Joplin screaming, “Take it!
Take another little piece of my heart!”
So he took it.

Dancing on dimly lit stage
in cheap bar to “Bye Bye Miss American Pie,”
a loathsome song
Hoping for enough tips
to pay rent and food after no-fault divorce
One year into passionless marriage.

Standing in front of a gathering of good friends
I listen to Gary playing “Give Yourself to Love”
on acoustic guitar
Yes, that’s what I’m here to do
Cast doubt and fear aside

Recite wedding vows
and surrender to a call to love
Just love.



ocotillo

When My Husband Goes Out

When my husband goes out,
which is not very often,
I leave my dirty dishes
in the stainless steel sink,
my book open in the middle
of the dining room table,
and my soiled socks
on the pink sofa.
I click on the radio
to my favorite station,
turn the volume up
till it can't go any higher
and sing along off key
as loud as I can,
savoring the pure abandon.

It's not that I don't love
my husband to pieces.
I do.
It's just that there are
certain urges I must
keep in check
when he is present
in order to preserve
this precious marriage.

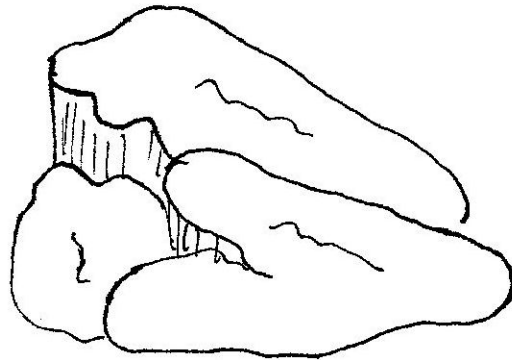
I sometimes wonder what urges
he gives in to when I go out.

Words To Live By

First flame ignites
freshman year.
Frat party acquaintance.
A senior, a charmer.
Painfully predictable story:
Dinner, a movie, an apartment
off campus.
A girl green as the
farms of New Jersey
falls hard.
A week later, no call
A month later, no call
In dorm, disconsolate
I wander halls
in search of a handout
a life raft
A friend hears my lament
Hands me a key
This too shall pass.
Words that soothe and comfort,
Make life's trials bearable.

Fresh air of
mountain morning
Sunshine pink
through rabbit's
translucent ear
Four point buck in velvet
nibbles tip of creamy
yucca blossom
as if the rest is inedible
Two free range eggs
fry in cast iron skillet
Toast pops up

perfect brown
waits to be buttered
Back ache from shoveling
yesterday almost gone
Cheery husband hugs
nuzzles my neck
I croon in contentment
and know
this too shall pass.



Yesterday

Yesterday my phone rang as I rinsed lettuce in the sink.

A man's voice asked, "Did you forget our date for this afternoon?"

Puzzlement.

"No, I don't remember."

Horror.

How could I forget a date?

But I wouldn't make a date with a man other than my husband.

The voice again: "Don't you remember?"

You said you would come to the bedroom when you were done in the kitchen."

Embarrassment.

"Steven?"

I didn't recognize your voice."

Confusion.

How can I not know my husband's voice?

And if I can't,

how would I find him

in case of flood, hurricane,

or nuclear winter?

He might call to me

and I wouldn't follow the voice,

thinking it came from another husband.

Blue footed boobies identify their mates at the breeding grounds each year.

Female penguins locate their young among thousands of crying babies.

So why don't the tiny hairs

on the back of my neck

stand up when I hear his unmistakable voice?

Whoever said that humans are superior

doesn't know me.

Laughs

Dog Biscuit

If you are a dog
who lives in my neighborhood
you know what time
the mail is usually delivered.

You recognize the sound
of the mail truck
stopping by the boxes.

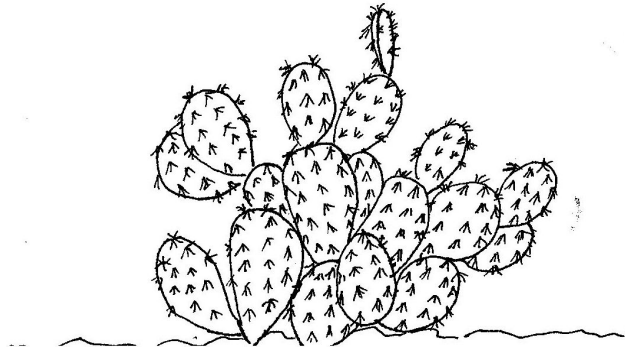
Your ears perk up,
saliva saturates your muzzle,
your tail wags,
your paws hit the ground,
you run to the door,
and beg to go outside.

If you are lucky
Anita will still be
stuffing the boxes.
She'll see you coming,
she'll stop to reach
inside the truck,
retrieve a biscuit
and offer it to
your eager mouth.

If you get there late
you know you'll still
get a biscuit,
jammed in between
your owner's bills
and junk mail.

Paranoid

I'm writing this poem from inside a psych ward.
They locked me up in here. I'm really quite bored.
Everybody's trying to ruin me, I claimed.
No they're not. You're just paranoid, Shrink
explained.
But I have proof which I'll tell you if I may.
Somebody stole half of my 401K.
I was laid off from my job at Ford last week.
My house was foreclosed but I tried not to freak.
At the town food bank, the shelves were almost
bare.
Nothing but peanut butter, but I didn't care.
That peanut butter gave me salmonella.
Couldn't afford a doc, so I prayed to Buddha.
Everybody's trying to kill me, I moaned.
Don't be silly. You're just paranoid, they intoned.
Just relax and take a few more valium.
O.K. I'll stay here and write another poem.



Rules

First it was:
finish your peas
Always say please
Polish your shoes
Don't cry if you lose
Just do as I said
Say your prayers before bed

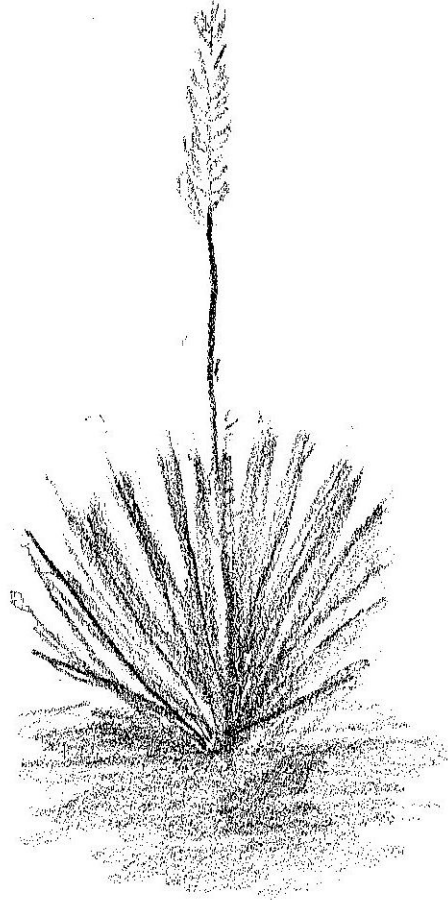
Later it was:
make sure your speech is correct
show your father some respect
always carry Kotex with you
be home before curfew
stop acting so indignant
for God's sake don't get pregnant

Then it was:
Work hard and get ahead
Make sure your husband's well fed
Exercise every day
If things get tough, pray
Save for retirement
Buy insurance for accidents

Now it is:
Eat plenty of fiber
Invest in stocks of high caliber
Keep in touch with friends and family
Donate what you don't need to charity
Remember to take your evening pill
Before it's too late, make out your will

Some rules apply, regardless of age:
Take a walk outdoors every day

Remember to laugh, sing, dance and play
Keep a sense of curiosity and wonder
Be kind and courteous; control your anger
Feel free to be different; don't pass judgment
Live in the moment. Breathe.



Sotol - Dripping Springs
Park - near Las Cruces
Xmas '05

Sex Like An Electric Toothbrush

My new sonic toothbrush has a timer.
A little buzzer tells me when
to switch quadrants in my mouth:
thirty seconds for the upper front
thirty seconds for the upper back
thirty seconds for the lower front
thirty seconds for the lower back
“helps insure dental professional
recommended brushing time”
says the box.

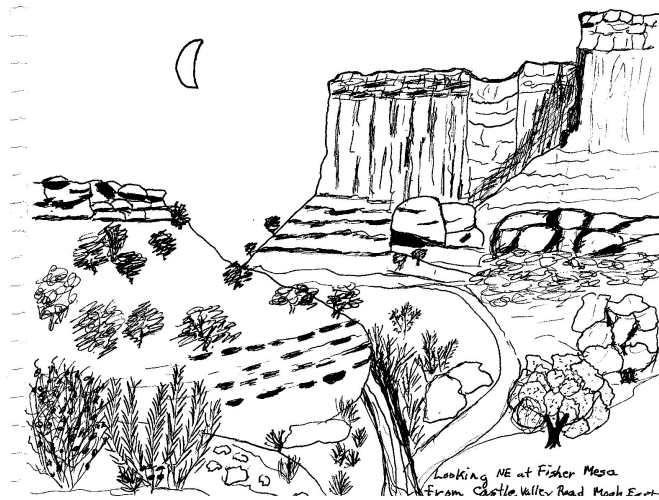
What if sex were like that?
Sex professionals could establish a
recommended touching, fondling, caressing time
for sensitive areas of the body.
A little buzzer implant in the brain
would tell us when to switch:
ten minutes for lips
ten minutes for nipples
ten minutes for buns
ten minutes for vaginas
ten minutes for penises.
That’s postmenopausal women timing.
For teenage boys timing increments
would be adjusted radically downward.
In case of a time crunch and a quickie is required,
timing could be shortened by sweating copiously.
On a rainy or snowy Sunday afternoon
timing could be lengthened indefinitely.
If our batteries run low,
we’d recharge in a hot bath.

Words I read on my Sonicare toothbrush box
suggest the obvious application to the arena of sex:

“extra-soft,” “gentle,” “enhanced maneuverability”
“contoured,” “encourage,” “improves...health and
safety.”

If we are not 100% satisfied for any reason,
we’d be given a full refund, no questions asked.

Excuse me.
My buzzer just went off.



What A Liberal Looks Like

He pulls up next to us.
Him, in his 2007 blood red Dodge Ram 4x4
that gets 12 miles a gallon at best
with a GOD BLESS AMERICA sticker on the
bumper
and us in our Pinon Jay blue Prius
that gets us to Denver and back
on one tank of biofuel
with a BUSH LIES, WHO DIES decal
on the rear side window.

I can see it coming.

He rolls down his window,
leans his 70 some year old bulky frame
out ever so slightly
and hisses,
“I jest wanted to see what a liberal looks like,”
with a disgusted, derogatory tone
that could refreeze the melting ice cap.
As if, if he blew us away with a shotgun blast,
it wouldn't come close to
quelling his seething, simmering hatred and
loathing
for our kind.

My husband shrugs it off
while I sit, stunned, numbly
examining my fingernails
for signs of cracking.

Losses

Migration

It's mid August.
Most of the hummingbirds
have already begun their
long journey south
in anticipation of
Colorado winter.

A friend died
A few days ago.
I like to think that
he too decided it was
time to go.
That the thought
of another cold
winter ahead
was not particularly
appealing.

He once said,
Life is not the end
or the beginning.
It is a part of an endless
process of change.

Change he did.
In form no more,
he's flown away
with the hummingbirds
to join a timeless,
courageous
migration.

Moving On

It's time to move on
you said.
Into the tired truck
you threw your
well worn suit of armor
your gleaming trophies
your jeans patched in the knees
your ever cheerful face mask
your unrealistic expectations
that snuck in through the back door
in our fourth year
nestled comfortably on
the living room couch
and nailed the coffin shut
on our dreams
with love's heart
still beating inside.



Great Basin Gopher Snake - Bartlett Wash, Moab Oct 1 2004

Teadorina

As I slip into the room she struggles
to lift her frail frame out of bed.
“Espera,” I tell her and ring for an assistant.
“Es la hora de almorzar,” she insists
through a hole where teeth once lined up.
She’s certain it’s lunchtime even though
the wall clock is too distant for her
tired eyes to decipher.
“Tienes hambre?” I hope she’s hungry
because her reluctance to eat is one reason
she’s in this nursing home. “Si, si,” she assures me,
nodding a beautiful head of wavy silver hair.
I wheel her into the dining room,
slide her bony knees under the table
across from the tape bearing her name.
Teadorina. We are early. She likes to watch.
Her gaze follows the dining room staff
as they distribute flowered bibs and glasses of
water.
The meal is placed before her. She makes a face.
I don’t blame her. Mystery meat, overcooked
carrots and pasty mashed potatoes stare up at her.
“Coma!” I encourage her to eat,
knowing she’d much rather have tamales
from Rosario, Sinaloa, where she grew up.
Grasping fork with paper thin hand,
she picks, like a child told she must
eat her oatmeal before she can leave the table.
Dementia aside, she’s smart.
Deep in her bones, she knows
that what nourishes the will to live
is not food, but people.

Watching

I watch as Cabrini assumes
her customary spot in the sun
on the living room rug.

The owner of the barn
where I found the smokey grey kitten
almost nineteen years ago said take her
or the coyotes will. So I took her.

I anxiously observe
my cat for signs of dying.
Can she still walk?
Can she still use her litter box?
Can she still eat?
How long will it take?

We have history, she and I.
In earlier days, she'd walk
the bathtub rim while I soaked
and mused at her sense of balance.

She'd position herself exactly
midway between us when my mate and I
argued, as if, by her silent witness,
she could will us peace.
Later, she'd come to my bed
as I sobbed, comforting me, rubbing her long
silky fur aside my heavy chest.

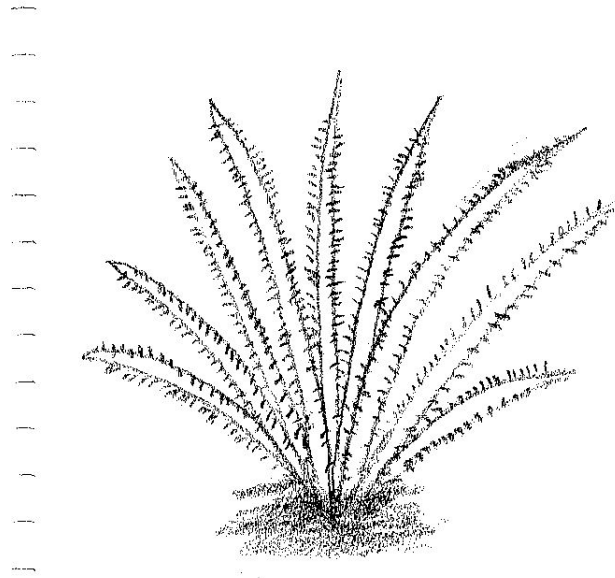
In recent years road trips chased away
her twenty three hours a day napping habit,
turned her into an adventurer.

New smells, new sights

stirred up, rekindled her kittenness.

Laps have never been safe
around Cabrini. Sit down and you have
a cat warming your private parts,
purr purr purring, looking for a hand
out stretched to stroke her extraordinary
ordinariness,
make her day blissful.

Haltingly, she hoists herself
up off the rug, gingerly takes a step
on unstable arthritic legs,
makes her way to her food bowl and sniffs.
I watch and wonder when the hideous error of death
will have its way.



What I have Left

What I have left of my father's long life
fits in a cardboard shoe box.

There's a handmade sling shot
used to fell small birds,
supplement a meager diet
in an impoverished Sicilian village
on the side of an active volcano.

Three bronze medals embossed with symbols
of Catholicism and the words,
"Collegio Municipale Randazzo" and "Al Merito"
hang from red, white and green striped ribbon,
testify to youthful achievements in church and
school.

A wind up wrist watch,
its brown leather band
frayed and stained with sweat
from years of toil and Jersey summers
measured his minutes, when to open shop,
when to close up and go home.

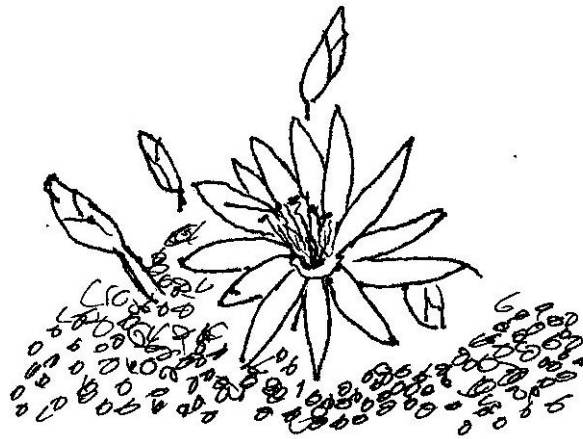
A pair of barber's shears takes up most space
in the shoe box, used to clip
countless heads of hair through forty years,
marriage and four daughters
to an uneventful retirement.

Here's a photo of him in his 20's,
handsome, dark and dashing
in a three piece suit and snappy hat.
Another taken twenty years later,
in tux and satisfied grin at his wedding to mother.

Then, at his 90th birthday party, bald, wider of girth,
bent, flanked by his five women.

A corner of the box cradles a small glass jar
holding his cremains, tiny pieces of ash and bone
that used to be him.

How a 170 pound body teeming with cells,
designed to digest food, solve crossword puzzles,
savor joy, endure pain, tell jokes,
(which he did the day before his heart stopped)
be reduced to this, I will never grasp,
no matter how long I live.





Never Again

There is a flower
whose sweet fragrance
I will never again inhale.

There is a tree
whose cool shade
will never again shelter me from the sun.

There is a river
whose wild waters
will never thrill me again.

There is a smile
whose loving warmth
will never again grace my eyes.

