



Based on a true story

poems from 2018-2022

paul stokstad

Based on a true story | Paul Stokstad



Five years of poems

Does she know?

But does the beautiful girl
really know the
exceptional light
that shines through her

and does that divine shape
bring her the taste
of pure silence

as it does for us
as it stops and holds
our breathing?



The cup is where it usually is

The cup is where it usually is
my placemat on the west
side of the table

Just now my wife is at work
instead of in her usual seat
there across from me

All these years I have watched and listened
over one table or another
her growth from tied to free

And as she has grown
she has pulled me
along with her, since

When you live with someone
who is moving toward the light
all of your dark corners, too
become illuminated, and

Everything that I thought was
just the way I am, live with it
became revealed as a sham,
a mask, a coping strategy

And then, sitting up those little imps,
those ogres, those tired habits, in your mind,
and telling them, one by one, I thank you
for your service, you are free to go

And letting them disappear
like a timelapse speeded video
over Nova Scotia
is a wonderful thing
as the true coast of who you are appears
rugged, bright, green, and
reaching to an ancient sea

November 2, 2015



Sometimes I wonder

Sometimes I wonder
If there may be
At some point
A last flower seen up close
A last time hearing
Something by Leonard Cohen
A last laugh due to Jeeves
And Bertie
A last tennis ball
Hit just out of reach
Or a last day
Like this day
The last day
When, after the firedrill
At the nursing home
My sister Jan
Went into her room
Lay down
And breathed her last
And then became blue
Flows of water
Red, purifying flame,
And a sort of free
Unearthly laughter

Conveying thanks

To those that loved her

Comfort for those in loss

Concern for things

She missed doing

But mostly freedom

Pure freedom

May 1, 2016



Cleopatra Queen of Denial

Cleopatra she fine most the time
She go here there
And like when sista die she
Hep everyone who not unnastan
That sista she much better there

In the light, in the happy stuff
That be inside each and every
And that be the place you go
No question a that

Sometime Cleopatra she get a message
To give the left behinds
Like a thank you for all da years
You stayed for me
When I was broken, lost
In the bed, dyin' or crazy
You stayed for me

That message be given though
Not always unnerstood or 'cepted

And Cleopatra usually fine
When people die who was
Half ded already, hardly there
Not fully themselves
For so long, so very long
Because of the deep free thing
They find on the other side

Those that doubt it
Leave them to mourn
Cleopatra know
They better off

And so Cleopatra usually fine at the funeral
She think the body lying there is nothin
But the leftovers, not momma, not daddy
Just a leftover suit a clothes
And she wait while the others make their sad goodbyes
to the leftovers

And then she thinks hey, that's not momma
That's not daddy, that's not sista.
And usually mommy or daddy or whoever
be hanging around, happy, free
and so Cleopatra she happy too

It's just that this time,
Funeral dead and gone weeks ago
And driving two boys to a movie in Ottumwa
Somehow she felt the hurt, the loss,

Not so much a the sista
That went downhill day by day in the nursing home
The sista that smoked and ate wrong
and had been a long time crazy
the sista with diabetes, COPD, and mo'

but the sista that was
had made a group of five
and the Sista that was always there
suddenly wasn't

and Cleopatra finally knew
that Sista had not only died
but she was gone, inside

and that while as long as she knew anything
there had been five, proud, brothas and sistas
together, facing these decades, side by side
but now there were four

And Cleopatra, in the front seat
On the way to the movies
Missed and finally mourned her
All alone.

June 6, 2016



When that baby (for Lucia)

When that baby
Looks at you
When that tiny hand
Grasps your finger
When your heart as if
Comes out of your body
And sleeps on your chest
When you feel the field of your love
Radiating out, enfolding that tiny body
Then not only is a baby born
But a mother as well
And on your face
Where once lived a searching question
There is now a settled answer
Saying, yes, this, is something that was right,
good, real, complete, and worthwhile
A clear gift back, and forward
And now you will keep giving,
keep making that statement real, and permanent
As you feed, wash, hold, dress, protect, teach,
advise, empower, and someday release
this gift, this statement, this creation,
out into her own quest, her own search, her own discovery

June 3, 2016



It is written

It is written
that your visit on this planet
is a gift

It is written
that the same gift is given
to every other visitor

It is written
that to follow your path
is your only task

It is written
that you may cross another path
but not end it

It is written
that you do not have the right
to end your path

It is written
that you do not have the right
to end another's path

It is written
that if you end your path
you must review the pain and tears and work and love
that it took to make you, raise you, feed you, teach you,
and the loss felt by everyone you left behind

It is written
that if you call yourself a martyr
and a warrior for God,
you have used that name in vain
you are not in an army
that is close to God
you are moving farther away
and you dirty the name of your religion

It is written
that if you end your path
and also the path of others
that you must review every moment
of the pain and tears and work and love
that it took to make them, raise them, feed them, teach them,
and the loss felt by everyone
you took them away from, too early.
You will watch their faces
You will know who did this
You will regret, and regret, and regret.

It is written
that this will not be a heaven
and that your reward will be an emptiness
and that your soul will have to pay
for every tear, and every future moment
taken from those others, and their people

It is written
that you will have stolen their future
and their chance to walk their path
to the end.

It is written
that you may be remembered by some
and maybe thought a martyr by others
but you will know, forever,
you are only a thief
in a long night of shame, alone.

It is written.

July 6, 2016



For some years

For some years
we face the world
as a family of seven
three boys, two girls
and the parents
under one roof
one sky
one way together
and then we extend
one then two to college
one to marry
one to nursing school
one to drama and protest
and conscientious objection
and one left over
the cuckoo's nest
then a kid or two
a marriage broken
an affair, a compromise
a retirement
a move to SF, to LA
to Laguna, and back
another marriage, or two
and then one to the nursing home, a long decline,

and then a death
some last minute poetry
another death,
and now the last was first
to go as well
still, as if in a game of
so many pieces
we are still seven
even as one piece
after another
is no longer
on the table

September 1, 2016



Driving through town

Driving through town
on Friday

I saw into a kitchen
and a discussion

A man carrying a rake
beside his house
And someone sitting
on her porch

Then I noted that
we all do things at home,
talk, clean, fold.

You may not know
when you think of me
that yesterday
I raked the yard
that I mowed too short
and sorted the silverware
so that my wife
wouldn't have to.

And that each of us has
things that we do quietly
and alone but in
some way, for some reason
we all live here
together, in this town.

September 1, 2016



I'm voting for you this time

I'm voting for you this time
not for Hillary, or Bernie, or Donnie, Jack or Jill,

I'm voting for you
to find love
learn what you need
laugh, play, discover

For you and the policeman
or you as the policewoman
to know, understand and laugh together

For you of this faith
to smile and treasure
you of that faith

For you of this gender
to nourish and protect
this my sister
this my brother

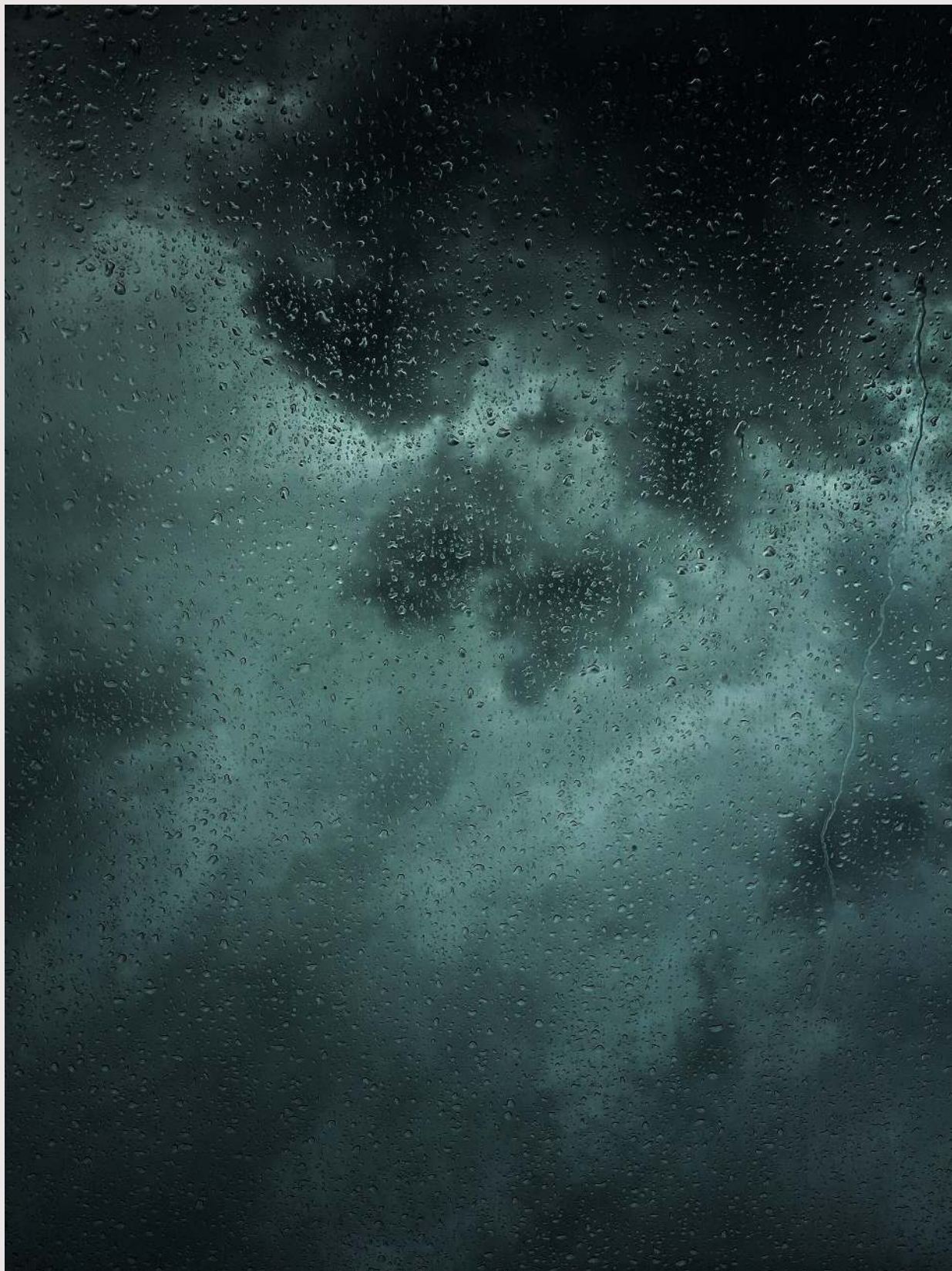
For you of this color
to snuggle up and smile
next to you of that color
as we of these colors
make a big rainbow

For me of this love
to celebrate you
of that love, and to know
that more love is
a good thing

My real vote this time
is for you
the big you
the happy
enlightened you

Welcoming you now
to your inauguration
your birthright
as the President
of the united states
of you

September 1, 2016



National Rain

Looking out of the window
the rain coming down
again

One wonders when again
the field will be light
and all the kinds of children

will come out to play
again

here, by the windowsill
again wondering
how long it will be
this time

and just what it will be to
test and again cause
the total failure
of the same old roof
that failed before

and once more
how long it will be this time
before the inner sun
comes out
once more
once again

November 4, 2016



Naked White Men

Naked white men
standing on the hill
up until now
dressed in rags, hidden
in the crags and caves
of this holy mountain

Now crawled to the top
clothes off
patting each other
on the back

“See how we are dominant
again, see how we rule,
how we run the world again?”

Still, standing and watching you the naked white men
on top of the hill,
we see you, again.

We see you naked, there,
you cannot hide.

We see you for what you are
and all that you were
hiding in the shadows.

Now out in the sunlight
of consciousness
you cannot hide.

You think you have won but no,
you have only
come out of hiding
so that we can watch you shrivel and shrink
there in the high pure air.

It is only fitting that your crumbling bodies
should dry to powder,
there in the bright sunlight,
and then,
due to an eastern wind,
blow away,
in a long thin cloud of dust.

December 1, 2016



Tuesday night

Tuesday night
all my dear ones
fast asleep

a cold night before
a cold winter

one thing I'd like
to mention is

that if we ever met
or even if
we haven't

thanks for sharing
this planet,
this time,
this air

December 4, 2016

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December 18, 1949

It's December 18, 1949,
and I'm held in a warm,
beating, comforting,
but decreasingly sized space.

I'm fed through a tube
in my belly,
and I hear a high song
of love.

Just out the door awaits
a world of actions, movements,
words and decisions

I will open that door
in two days, in the
Allen Memorial Hospital
Waterloo, Iowa
12:33 pm

Setting out on a path
and an intention
to do this life
better than the last

and to be known this time
for love and laughter
rather than war and loss

Joining me will be
many others
who also hope
to do well, to be well

As we we journey together
through a world
that still needs

all the light, love
and consciousness
we can bring

December 18, 2016



The Day After

Today the cats
wander the house
wishing for different weather

they ask us to open the door
now and then
maybe thinking that

one more time
when we do
somehow it will be better

little do they know
that it is the day
after Christmas

and it is the law
that little or nothing
can happen today

December 1, 2016



You can't deface this synagogue

You can't find my synagogue
Because I'm not even Jewish

You can't vandalize
this synagogue
Because it is invisible

You can't reach
this synagogue
because it is made
of hope, reverence, tradition,
a long study of the torah,
a deep care for knowledge, learning,
and mystical beauty

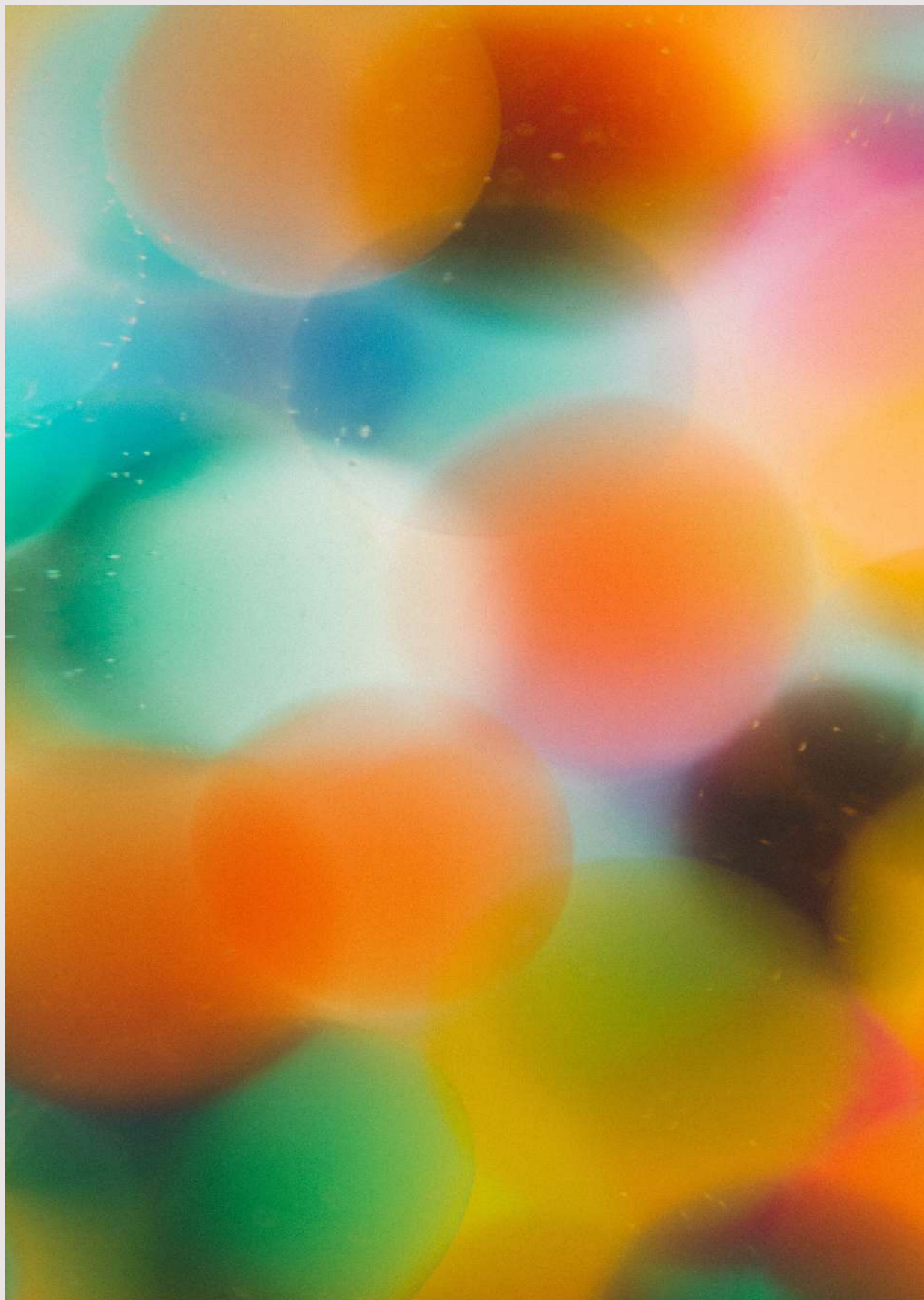
You can't paint slogans on
this synagogue
because it is hidden from view,
shared among people
who love each other,
care for each other

You can't touch this
synagogue
because it is passed
like a candle
from heart to heart
deep inside
from Jewish person
to Christian person
to Muslim person
to unlabelled person
as a love, a respect,
and a deep connection that
cannot be painted, marked,
or even seen

But it can be felt
by those with a heart to feel
a hand to touch,
an eye open, and
a light on, deep inside

December 1, 2016

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Five years of poems

Imagine 2.0

Imagine there's no gender
it's easy if you try
no need for definitions
chromosomes x and y
Imagine all the people loving any way

Imagine there's no marriage
it isn't hard to do
nothing to buy a ring for
and no divorces too
Imagine all the people loving all the world

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope you'll reconsider
this gender tag on everyone

Imagine there's no sexes
I wonder if you can
No need for forms that ask you
are you a woman or a man
Imagine all the people, gender label free,

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope you'll reconsider
this gender tag on everyone

January 1, 2017



If you put a seed

If you put a seed

in the ground

dark forces gather

dusky minerals flow

water comes

The deep dark
holds that seed,
feeds it
brings what it needs
to swell a bit
to take those elements
those aspects
of what we call dirt and
convert them into cell
and sprout
reach up
to the light
and then, breaking out
but still holding firm
and rooting deeper
into a firmer
finer relationship
into the dark source
to then stretch
flowering
to the light

The front lawn
these trees
the last flowers
of the season
here like clothing
for a deep dark
nourishing earth

January 3, 2017

Based on a true story | Paul Stokstad



Five years of poems

If you have a thought

If you have a thought
of a certain kind and
put it in the mind

light forces gather
things quiet down
lose boundaries

Consciousness
attracts the mind
more than the thought

and there is a sort
of expansion
maybe even
thought forgotten
you find a source of light
beyond light inside

then as you soak in that
which is only you
the deep you
the quiet you
the true you

it cleans out the noise

replaces it with

(silence)

And then later you

think in silence

walk in silence

talk in silence

move and bring

the silence

everywhere

January 4, 2017



No more men

no more men

or women

just people

no more french toast

just toast

fried with egg

no german

chocolate cake

it's now chocolate

cake with coconut

no more definitives

just infinitives

nothing decisive

only incisive

no labels to define

just things to

refine

If I'm in love with you

it's you, me

and the love

that's it

January 5, 2017



A poet for president

Enough lawyers and business
magnates in office
more women needed
more people of color
and nuance

And if by any chance
we let a single man
be a politician
let it be someone
confused about his gender
because he simply doesn't fit
due to frequent, unmanly absorption
into beautiful moments
involving bluebirds, cardinals,
and other birds less famous
on the porch outside
Holly Manon's democratic party meeting.

And let him not write legislation,
but linger, as the new congress
of women and colorful people
gather, and make the right decisions,
so that he can document,
in a forever poem,
the change from a dying country
to an enlightened world

January 4, 2017

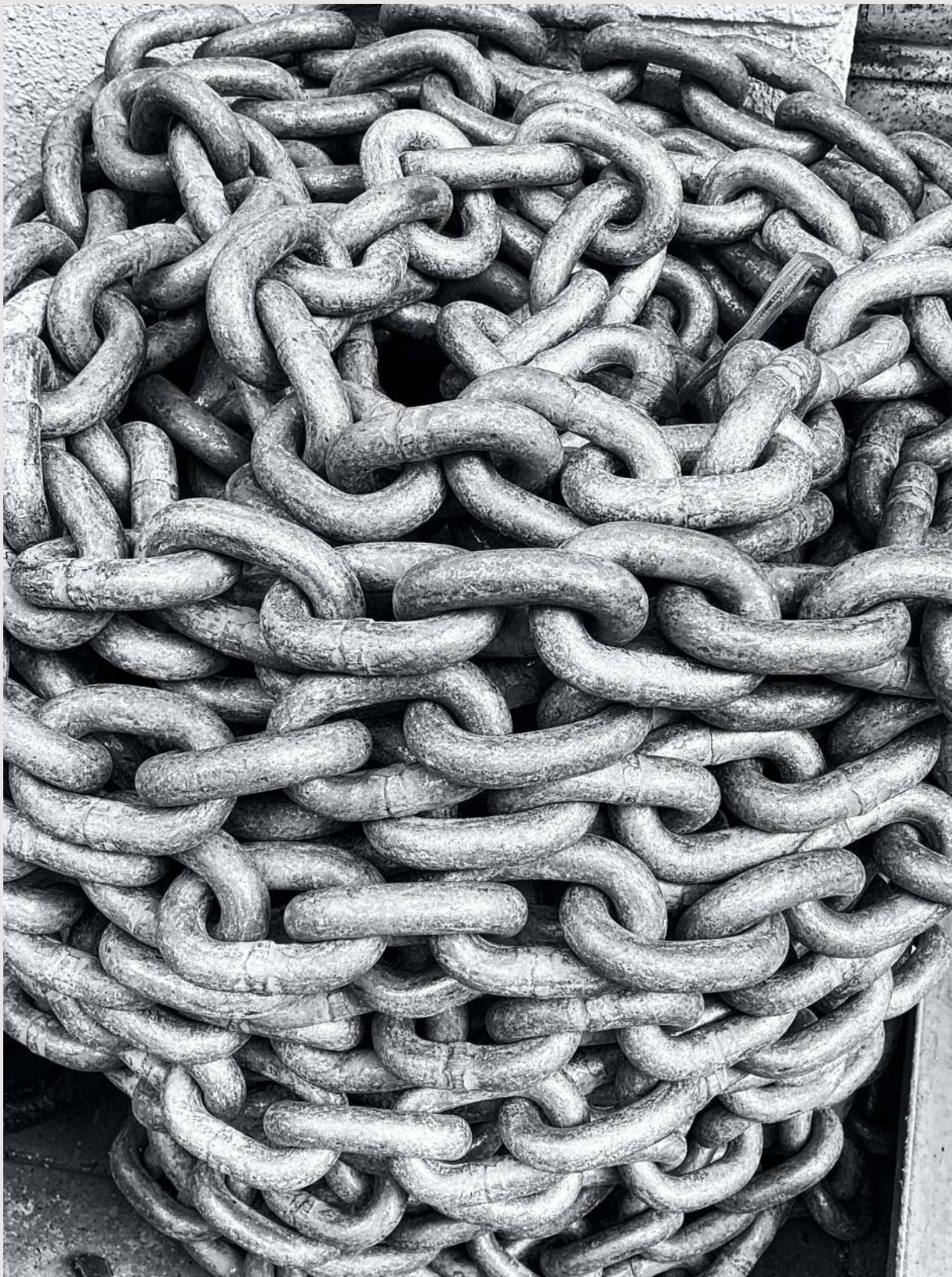


In this love

Imagine with me
that as you move
within the room
or space that you are in
right now
look to the left
pick something up
and stop
that you move
through love,
walk through love,
that every move, every
turn, every thought, each action
is admired, lovingly filmed,
that an eternal record
follows each of your moments
that someone, you, me,
your mother, somebody,
is watching, and adores
everything that you
do, and are,
and then,
holding that as real
you now enter

into the ceremony,
the beauty, the miracle
that you are, were,
and always will be,
here on this earth,
in this time,
in this love.

January 2, 2017



Give me back my chains

Give me back my chains
so again most people go to hell,
though not my people

Give me back my chains
where you are man enough
or the class joke

Give me back my chains
where the russians are my enemy

Give me back my chains
where only white guys
get to be quarterback

Give me back my chains
where a square meal
includes a dead corner

Give me back my chains
where the last word
is always daddy's

Give me back my chains
where if you weren't born here,
there's something wrong with you

Give me back my chains
where a woman's body
is only on loan from men
not in her control

Give me back my chains
where the American
is my way or the highway

Give me back my chains
where there is no connection between me
and the polar ice cap, dude.

Give me back my chains
where you only get one gender, live with it

Give me back my chains
where if you die in the wrong skin
or wrong country it's news
but doesn't matter

Give me back my chains
where what I throw away
is someone else's problem

Give me back my chains
where I made a dollar
and tough luck for you, lazy

Give me back my chains
where you are stuck with whatever
brain you came with

Give them all back
I want to stare at them
Look at their rusty links
pile them up

And then in a white heat
melt them into a flowing river
sinking back into the earth

forever

February 2, 2017

Based on a true story | Paul Stokstad



Five years of poems

What to do in the dark

First of all remember
that the sun is fully shining
and though right now
the entire planet
seems to be in the way
somewhere it is still
brightest day

only on this side
of the world
is it dark
and on the other side
and everywhere else
throughout the galaxy
our sunlight reaches
in years of light

Secondly, the sun
is just an analogy
for the real light
inside everything

So even in the darkside
of what is after all
a sun moon
on this earth
in the basement
under the covers
there is golden light
in the air
from within
this is not a metaphor
hidden in a poem
I see it, right now

Even Dr. Hagelin,
that physicist
will tell you that
all the world we see
is somehow light
so even in the dark
we are not only in light
but made of it

So when the times
are dark
know this
that those of us
who know this light
must touch it and
spend time in this
inner light
every day

and must also
hold tightly onto
and treasure each other
like children asleep
in soft pyjamas
in the night

knowing that our sun will rise
again someday, to warm
our shining faces
our glowing hearts

March 4, 2017

Based on a true story | Paul Stokstad



Five years of poems

Cri de Coueur

Can it be
over soon,

the part with tears,
the part where hopes
stop at a border,

the part where God
means no?

Can it
be over soon,

the thing where we
disagree,

the thing where
what we believe
makes who we love
smaller?

Can
it be over soon,

where the word American
has a question mark
instead of an
exclamation point?

Can it be over
soon,

where people tell us
what to believe
and who to love,

where rich has no heart
and poor no hope?

Can it be over soon,

where leaders lead
in gathering hate,

where we forget
that there are no black
and white people,
only people on a rainbow
of light to deep?

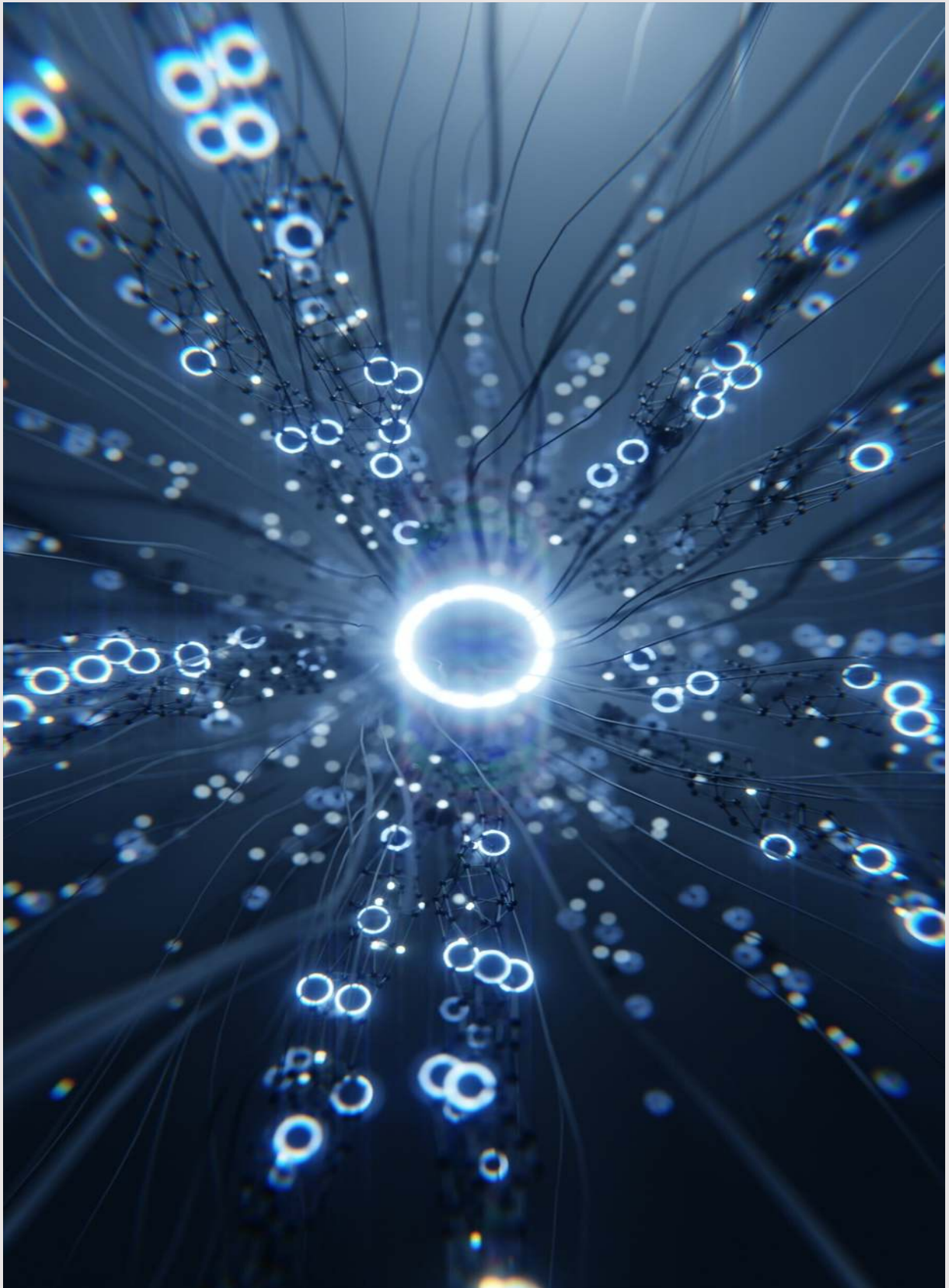
Can it be

over soon,

where being right

is more important than

being one?



Miracle

Everywhere that you went today
there was a sort of miracle.
I suppose you missed it
(most people do)

It had trillions of cells,
seventy-eight organs
and forty-six miles of nerves,
carrying messages at 170 mph.

Without thinking about it
it could breathe, pump
blood, process lunch
and make cells
while the sun shone.

It could feel, think, remember,
speak, read, write, and respond.

It could probably reach out
and touch, feel the heat,
It possibly walked, leaned,
crawled out or into bed

It learned

It watched

It thought

It smelled or tasted

and maybe, hopefully

loved

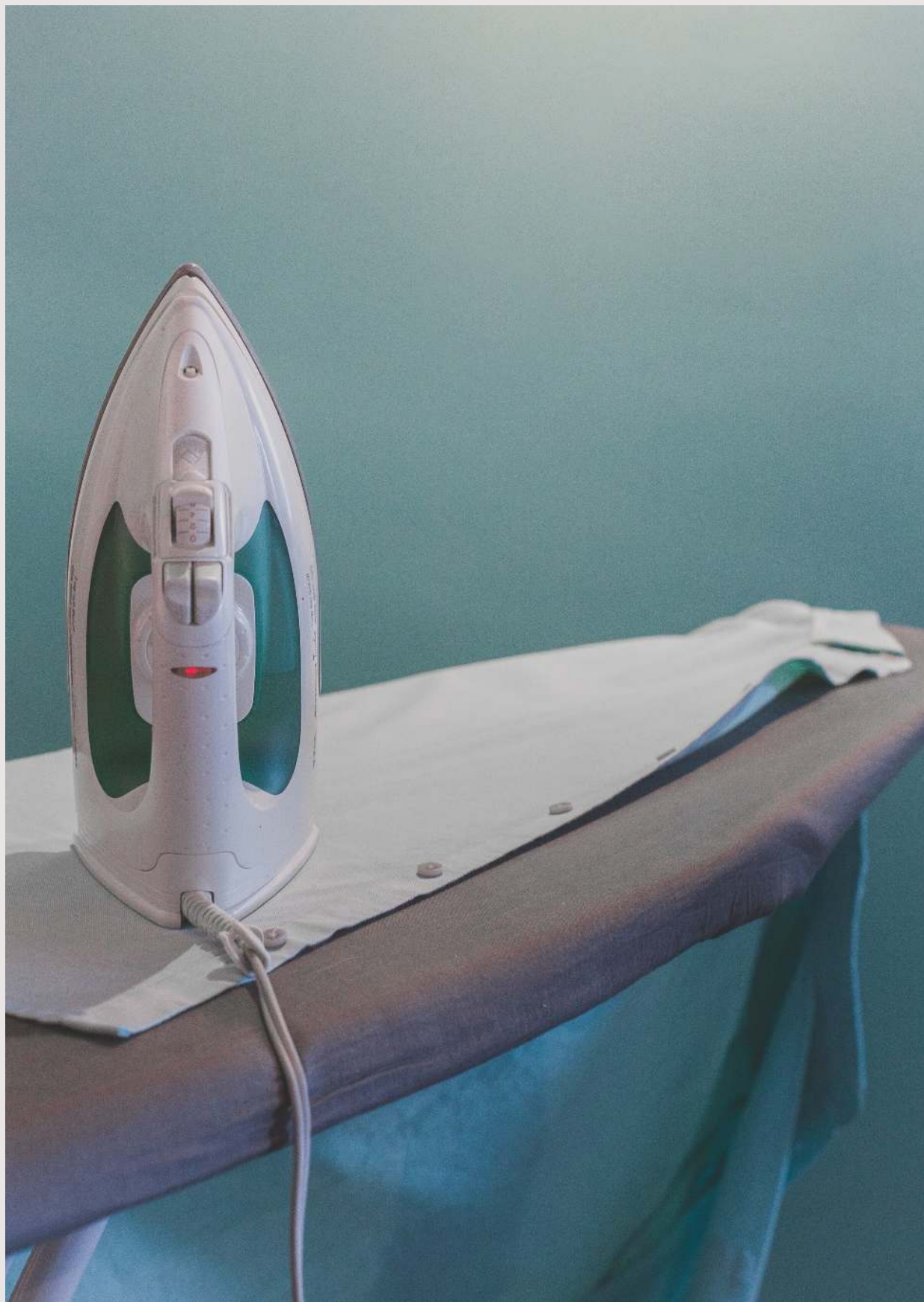
Really, there was

some kind of miracle

all day, wherever

you were

April 3, 2017



Conscious homework

You might not know
when you think of me
that, sorting laundry
I make two piles
one for the dresser
and one for the closet

That I'm not much
of a cook
but do scrub
pots and tools,
fill and empty
the dishwasher

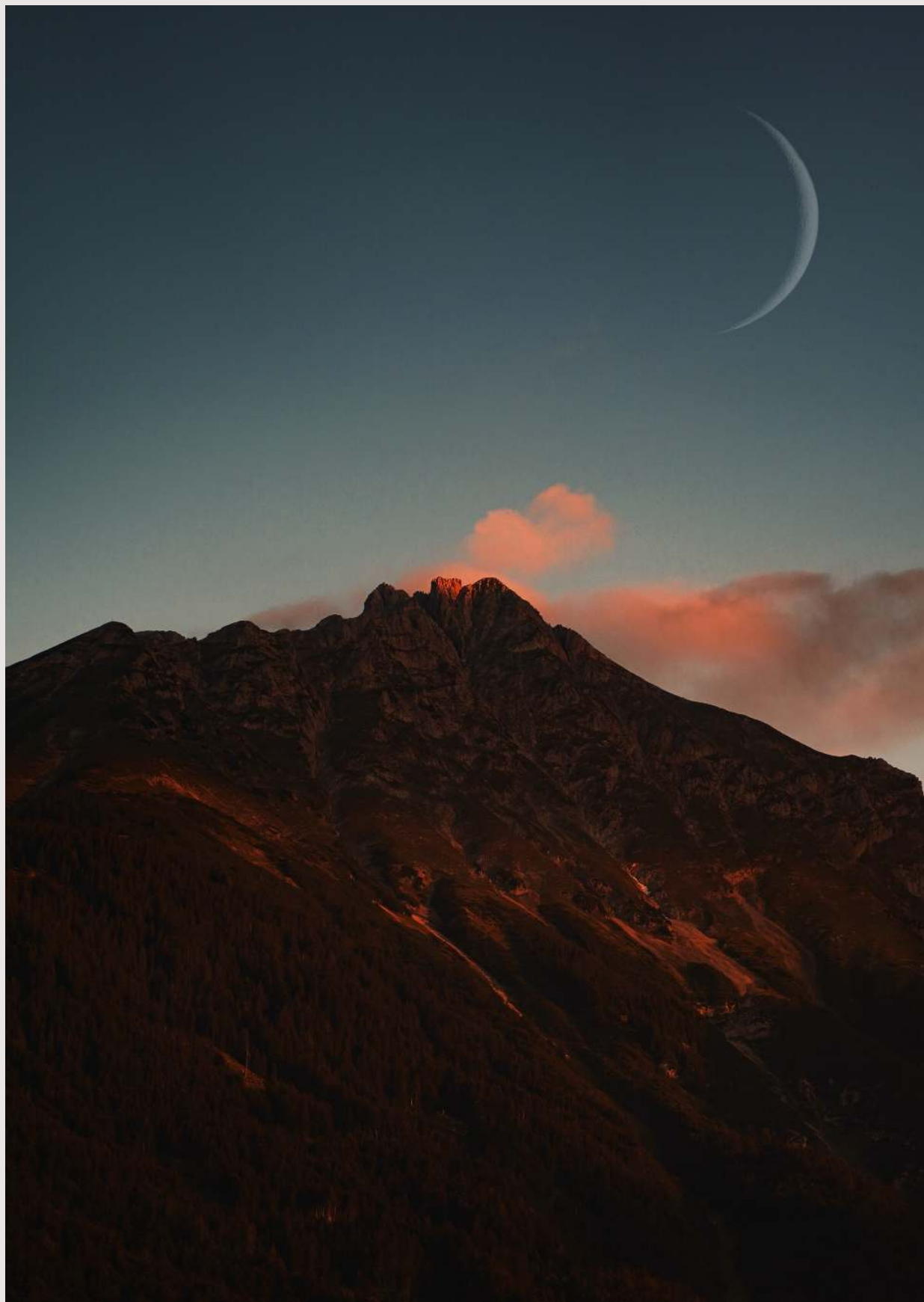
You may not know
that I take out trash
make our bed
feed the finicky cats
and add gas to the car

There may seem to be
nothing special
in these acts

But I am grateful
to be with all of you
as we do them

April 3, 2017

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Five years of poems

Barely day

Barely day

I open one eye, and
see her in the dark,
gliding over
to the dresser,
the closet,
one last time, and
then out the door,
off to work.

Small, slender,
she moves
through the room
and my
grateful heart

April 3, 2017



Last Day

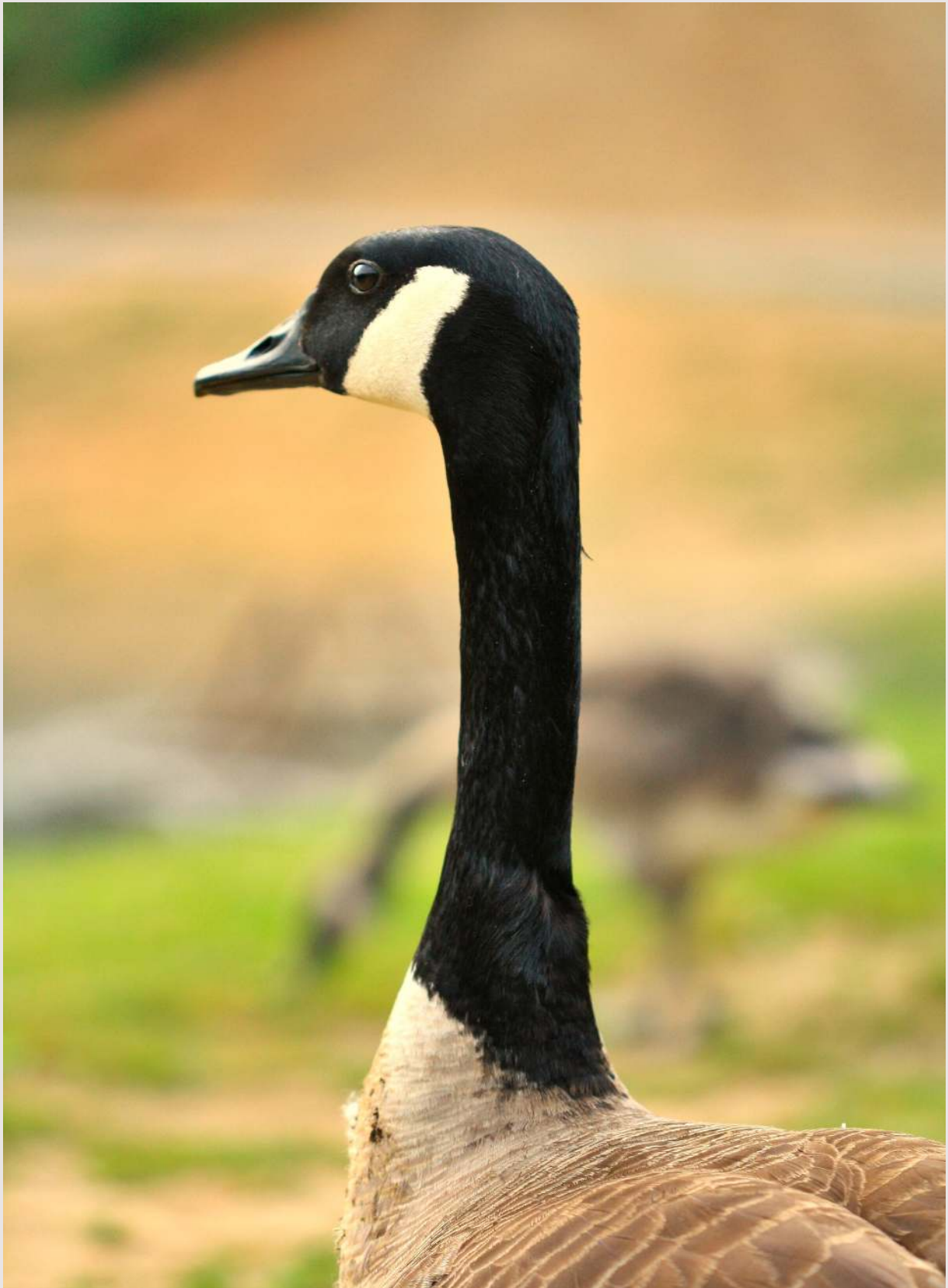
In the evening of
my Father's last day
I fed him peas and carrots
He didn't like the
chocolate Ensure

I sang " Just a closer
walk with thee"
and Mary hugged him.

Then some people
we didn't know
showed up, and
he led an animated talk
about their
athletic daughter
after which he tired and
we left him to sleep

Then at 2 am we got the call
and sister Mary and I,
took that first time ever
last drive, for which
there is no training
to see what was left of him

and Mary took
a few snips
of dear grey hair
for each of us
to keep



Goose Memory

Last week on the roof
of a skeleton beamed barn
-all siding gone-
a Canadian goose stood
throughout our tennis match
half a block away

All alone, watching
we knew not what,
a silhouette in grey
until, just as we loaded up
into cars, another goose rose
from the bracken
and they both soared over

Now this week
a Caterpillar branded
earth mover
dug a hole and
the bones of the barn
were burned and buried
leaving only a goose memory
floating thirty feet
in the air

May 1, 2017



Where is that cub?

Where is that cub
Mother Lion?

He left today
out into the field

Where is that cub?

He used to tuck
his little body
next to you
in our bed of grass

Fearful thing
I suppose
he needed you
and you him

From my side
I understood
cubs need their mother
mothers need their cub

I allowed this
as a part of the way

Knowing that someday
the cub would leave you
out into the field

What would you do then
with the cub gone?

Even so, sometimes with you
on the hunt, I would allow
that cub – his little body –
to tuck beside me
in his sleepy times

Not of course with you back
but sometimes
but of course
I had no need of this

Still, now
I look to the horizon
and ask you
Mother Lion
where is that cub?

May 10, 2017



For Teddy

Sometimes people ask,
deeply concerned
does life have meaning,
or, looking down,
privately wonder,
do I have meaning?

The real answer
is not the normal,
cheer you up stuff,
because the truth is,
no, life has no meaning,
because life
is not about meaning
but being.

Life is about emergence
flowering into fragrance.
It is too full of being
and becoming
to worry about
a definition

For a system of
infinite silence
that also manifests as
dynamic beauty,

Looking for meaning
is an obsession
about labels
in a flower shop

Surrounded by roses,
peonies, irises,
and daffodils
you, filled with fragrance
need not worry,
basking in meaning-
free beauty

May 10, 2017



Dulce et Decorum

Orlando, Virginia Tech, Newton, Columbine

Madrid, Paris, Norway, London

Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Turkey

Pentagon, World Trade Center

Israel, Palestine, Lebanon

Sunni, Shiite

The existence of what is called terror

says that

this is all a lie

that going to a store

a classroom, a market

a wedding,

that getting on a plane

is a lie

that expecting

life as usual

is a presumption

in the light of

some other travesty

some other view

some other ideology

or just insanity itself

We must accept
this dying
as a message
that whatever
we are doing
or not
is not enough

We must accept
this dying
if we think that
killing terrorists
kills terrorism
That mental illness
responds to drugs
in time

We must accept
that what kills us
is the fact that
our every day
existence
is not enough
not peaceful enough
not loving enough
not good enough
not full enough
such that
no one lives in pain
no one lives alone
no one is so stressed
that even the thought
of hurting a complete
that's me
that's my sister
that's my mother
that's my brother
stranger
would happen

There is an answer
to all this
but it is a painful one
because it does
not involve
more guns,
more walls,
getting rid of
immigrant and
hijab people

It doesn't involve
doing or
restricting.
It doesn't label anyone
as evil or innocent

The answer is here
but you will not
have it, because
it doesn't
fit your idea
of what an
answer should be.

So, until you are
ready to admit
that this life
and this kind
of death
means that even
shopping
is a lie
of some kind
and that your snicker
when I mention
that inner silence
has the primal,
healing power
to fix all this
is part of the reason for
the dying sound of
your innocent gay brother
in Orlando
your friend, crashing in a
Pennsylvania field,
or the waves,
lapping on a child,
dead on some

mediterranean shore

You can laugh

but you don't have an answer.

Those of us who do
watch this sad parade
in wonder
and keep doing what we can
being what we can
and hope that someday
when all else has been tried
and failed
you will listen
to the sound
of one hand
clapping
to the chorus
of the kingdom
of heaven
within you
to the
inner sound of
your mantra
calling you
deep within.

June 10, 2017



Feed the Venus

Sometimes you have to
feed the Venus
it can't all be
html and CSS

Sometimes you have
fill your heart
with magical pools
reflecting trees full
of fireflies

It can't all be
investor research
and proper
annuity language

Sometimes you
have to
feed the Venus
with gold sparkle
rippling your way
from the sun on
the rise or set
across the ocean

It can't all be
selectional restrictions
and strict subcategorization

Sometimes Venus
must be fed by hand
staring into
her mystic eyes,
surrounded by her
lyrical shapes

Based on a true story | Paul Stokstad



For Finn

When you walk off the dock
and die
you sink beneath the water
and the part of the dock
closest to land
separates from the end
and floats away
and then there is a gap between the shore
and the remaining dock, out there
and we cannot follow you

When you walk off the dock,
because that is your purpose
and die
we stand by the shore
in wonder that
you have sunk out of sight

It's not that we can rescue you
Rescue efforts were made, long ago
But we can wonder about the fact
that there is water, dock, but no you

When you die, you are as if gone,
underwater
and when we walk by the lake, later,
we see the broken dock
but not you

Still, one thing you may not
have known
when you walked off
is that we own this water
we know this water
even here on shore
we are deeply connected
to all water

And not only that
We are part of all the earth
that holds all water
in it's palm

So, when you seem to disappear
from view
you are not lost to us
except for in the dry air
of daily living

Wherever you are floating
underwater
in the deep
we are that deep
we are with you in that
wet and full level
of coexistence

We hold you in our deep
dark, divine palm of love
and we never let go
we never agree that you are gone
just changed from living
in our visible love
to our invisible love
forever

June 3, 2017



The cost

There is a cost
in growing older
than 10, than 27
than 47, or more, because

You never know when
tears may fall
over a lost one eyed rabbit
over a shy girlfriend
moved to Osceola
over a marriage
drifting off to
San Francisco

There is a cost
in adding experience
to intention,
arriving at a sort
of wisdom,
because with that strength
you gain a weakness, since
tears may fall
over an old letter
a baby toy
off to Goodwill
and one more smile
just a photographic
memory



Don't be that guy

Don't be that guy
who walks into a church and kills people
who walks into a school and kills people
who takes a walk of any kind and at the end
people die.

Take a walk, sure, but not that kind of walk.

Don't be a stranger
Don't be so strange that you start to think
that killing things is the only way.
Don't get isolated and strange,
if there is any way you can avoid it.
Please stay in touch.

See if you can avoid any sort of logic which concludes
That killing people that you don't know is okay.
Or the thinking that killing those you know is okay.
None of that logic is real.

Don't be the guy who grows up only to somehow end up
killing strangers and their children.
As a parent I can tell you that raising even a single child
is a long and continual miracle.

Don't be the guy
who kills a miracle.

Don't be the guy who kills the hope
some parent had for their child.
and that includes your parents.

Don't ever think that you are a victim of circumstance
and that its okay to create more victims.

You are the creator of your circumstance.
Accepting that is the first step forward.

This task, this life that you set for yourself
is your own choice, your own decision,
your own test set by you.

And if you flunk the test there is no one
there at the end of the day
To stare at the report card but you.

If you really must kill someone,
consider the Buddhist way.
How differently the world reacts
to someone burning themselves for peace
than torching morning shoppers for war.

But, best of all, if you can, don't kill anyone
Find a way back into the light.
Find a way to connect with yourself
and others.

Don't be that isolated guy.
Don't get so alone that the only way
to touch people is to kill them.

And please, if you are not a killer, don't laugh
and point at that isolated kid in your class.
See if you can find a way
to talk to him, connect with him,
to take him from alone and anonymous
to noticed and named

Don't be that guy
who kills anything
especially don't, if you can,
die the walking death
which turns you into a killer

If you are a black guy, no killing black guys

If you are a white guy, no killing black guys

If you are a black guy, no killing white guys

If you are any color, no killing any color

All the crayons must get along

Nothing needs to be killed today.

Or any day.

Let this be a reminder to you

Don't be that guy



In the parking lot

In the parking lot, in the car, watching and
waiting for Johan after the band concert
The kids spilled out over the practice soccer field
Steam blowing off the engines after
Too much time squirming still

I can't take him home yet since
This is a lot more fun than the last two hours
He spent with beginner trombones and trumpets

It's a mix of kickers and passers
And someone's little brother making goals
Through pretended opposition

And then, a dare, a challenge, suddenly
Bhavani and Lulu, racing across the field
And up the hill to the playground
And then a slower trot back down

And a few moments later, again
Bhavani racing ahead
But with Lulu close behind
And then Lulu motoring stronger
up the hill, catching up

Three or four times, this race
Of thirteen year old girls
Soon to be women
Crossed my windshield
Left to right

May they recall this day
When fearless, unselfconscious,
Not weighed down
By public expectation,
reputation, bills, scheduling,
office or domestic negotiations,
they ran like gazelles, together
free and beautiful,

And how the one thing
that they needed, and truly had
to create a forever memory
was each other

January 4, 2018



The Grand Canyon, for Risë

It may seem surprising
but when I got this house
I didn't know it was right next
to the Grand Canyon

I got here at night,
after long travel
in other states
and other stories
and this was to be
my last stop

It was only some years
later that I learned
that this house
is right by the Grand Canyon

I walked out back one day
and what started out
as a sort of crack of light
when I got closer
turned out to be
a deep silence, with eons
of story, layered in ochre,
red and sand.

Standing at the edge of that
vast expanse, there is a sort
of awe, an ancient knowledge, an openness that is bigger
than my story
or your story
or any story

Now and then, people come
with questions
to ask the Canyon:
What was that about?
Who was that?
Why did this happen?
What will they do next?

And her answer
is almost always
to open, unwind,
flow deeper, yet sometimes
there is a saying, such as
You are not what
You think you are,
You are not doing
what you think you are doing,
What you think is happening
is not what is happening
(deeper forces
are at work).

Sometimes when we walk
the Canyon and I
through the neighborhood,
people drive by, and wave,
little knowing that
what is really walking by me
is an ancient wisdom
that never fails to fascinate
as the sun moves
east to west
across the convoluted
complex and yet
flowing landscape
and each day with her
brings a new turn,
a new depth
a new revelation

February 6, 2018



In the Now

We are not the opposition

We are the origin

We are not the future

our strength is in

the eternal now

Our someday

will never come

by waiting for it

but by being it

We don't have to wait

Until we can be

in charge again

What we are now

is our message

and policy

We do not have to vote

to be what we want

There has never been
a tomorrow
only a series of
todays

Today I declare peace
to every man, woman and
variation thereof

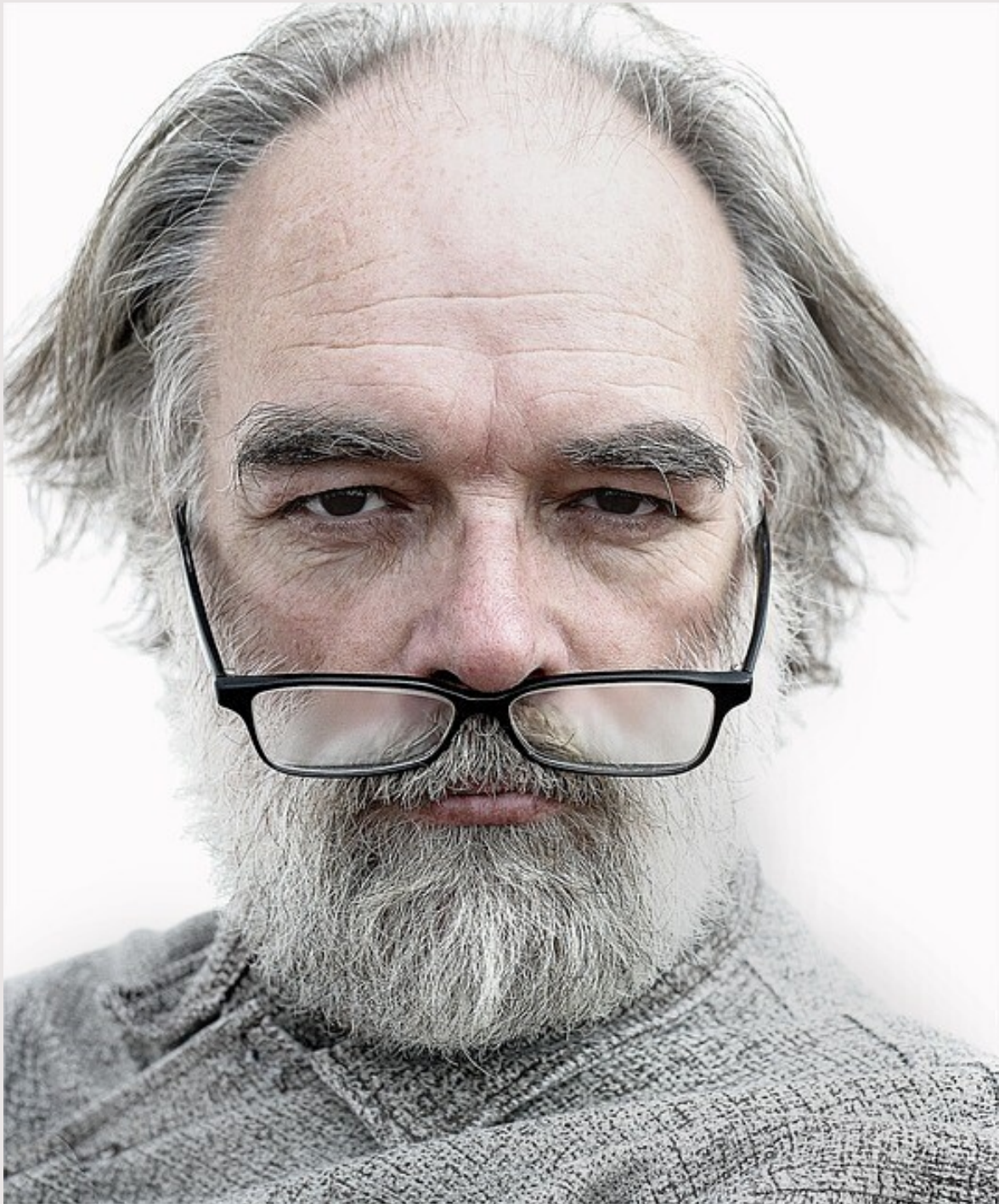
Today I declare love
for every animal, plant,
person and planet,
starting with this one

Today, in my country,
you are loved, embraced, celebrated and adored

In my country you
are a treasure of possibility
a miracle of organ systems
thoughts, feelings and
consciousness

In the eternal now
you, reading this
have all that's needed
to be a perfect world

May 1, 2018



The Lab School, 1968

Gathered to guidance by
Hutcheson, Helff, Holmberg, Happ, Harper, Hale,
Riechmann, Butzier, Struble, Aldrich,
Vanderbeek, Mazula and Mahon, all the names,
of teachers, looking out at little faces
wondering, what can these children become?

All of us, side by side,
year after simple year
in the 1950's, then Sixties
Marilyn Monroe, Rosemary Clooney,
Howdy Doody, Elvis, Poodle Skirts,
rattail combs, letter jackets, greasers,
the long walk to Big Rock
to inspect it's tiny animal skeletons
and back
one speed bikes by day
kick the can at twilight
doors unlocked at night

The grand experiment
of the newest teaching methods
PhD'd instructors
teaching student teachers
teaching students:
Schuler, Fish, Trapp, Aurand, Kelso, Cantine,
Moon, Maurer, Melberg, Anderson, Webb,
Thuesen, Niederhauser, Wheaton, Isley,
Voorhees, Green, Krumlinde, Lupardo, and more,
through drama, and song,
orchestra, Latin, and
driver's education.

A laboratory school
culturing us all
and then sending out
a sixty kid class
out into a world
of Hendrix and Joplin, 'Nam and teargas
assassination and impeachment,
hippies, communes and drugs,
disco and punk, purple and acid rain,
global warming, fake news,
and now iPhones, self-driving cars
and more genders than you can count

And after all, the result
of our research project
fifty years later
is not measured in
success or failure, wealth
or fame, wrinkles or fat,
the last note, the outcome,
from K through 12
all that is left
are memories of a simpler time
together, held on tightly
like a prom corsage
and a quiet, full and timeless love

for each other
not the compared success
the marriages or divorces
the careers or merely survival

A deeply rooted connection
from 1968 and beyond
that still informs and supports
a group of Little Panthers
aging, but still caring,
still connected.

June 1, 2018



Christian Q and A

The questions and answers
at the far end of the 50th
high school reunion dinner table
with the missionary's missionary
and his wife my schoolmate.

Were you an early Christian
or did you find it later?

Early, both early
don't you remember
we were in 8th grade Bible study
and I carried my Bible
on top of my books?

Are you still a believer
(some people turn their backs
on God)?

I don't know how you can
undo that deal
with it's special phrase
"I accept Jesus Christ
as my personal savior"
and why would you?

And if your back was turned
it would do you no good
God would just be
loving your back.

And even then
the real forgetting
is that God is here
and here, and here.

There is no hiding
anywhere in a sentence
anywhere in a room
from the divine.

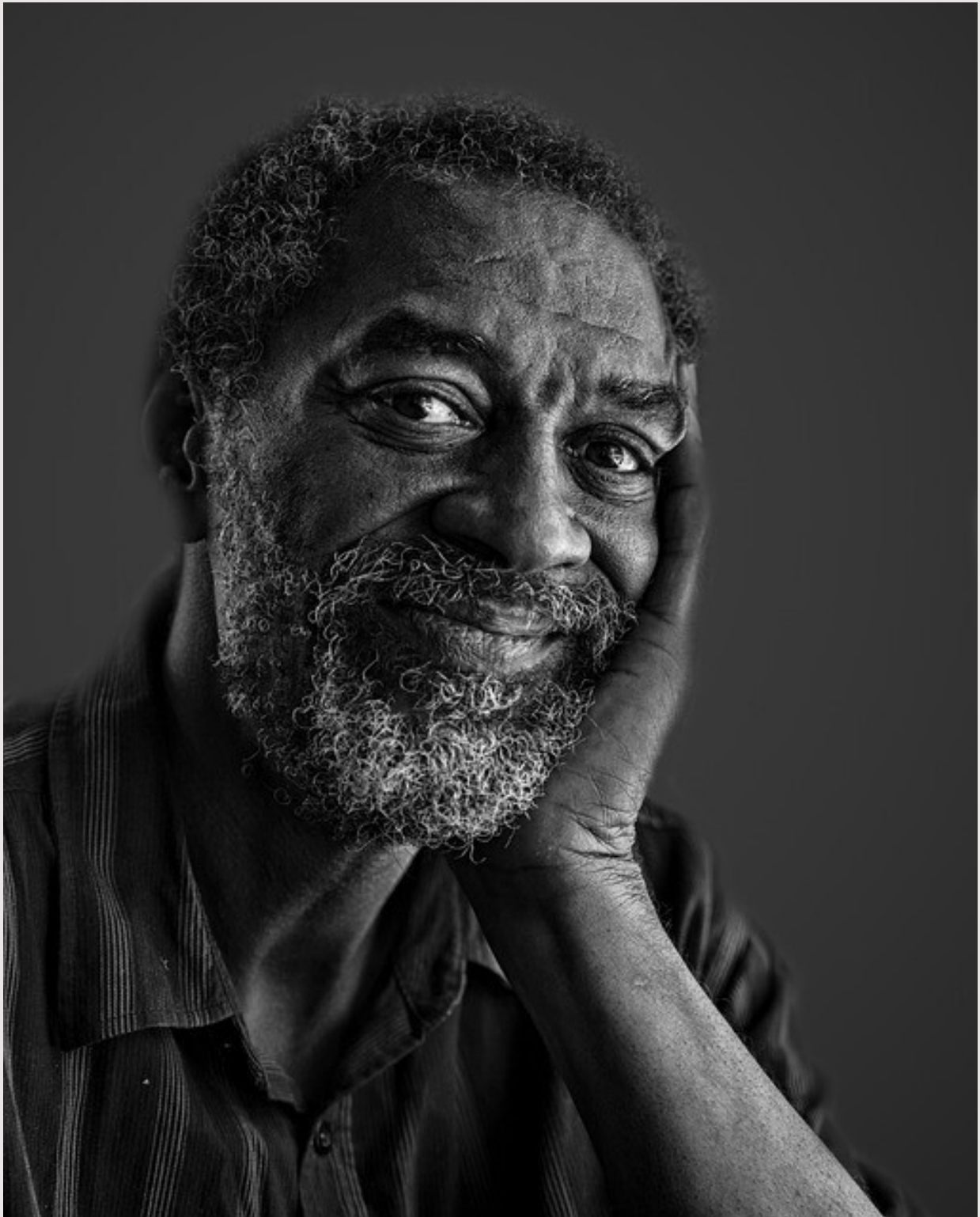
It is like asking
where is the water
while floating on the ocean.
You have to go out of your way
not to feel supported and filled.

Yes, If you believe in God
If you be/live in God
you are all wet
but in a good way.

And if people don't give God a footnote
in their story of creation
the good news is that
God is not lessened for lack
of recognition, or credit
on our part.

And two musical and
educational missionaries
and one person more known
for meditation, yoga
and consciousness
can still hold hands
before dinner
and pray.

June 2, 2018



Message to poets

I have nothing to say to you

But know that
I don't have to say it
because you
are already in touch
with nothing.

Since it seems that
nothing is the message
in almost every poem

—the deep, silent, full nothing
that is at the basis of everything—

You are not my audience
(what can I tell you?)

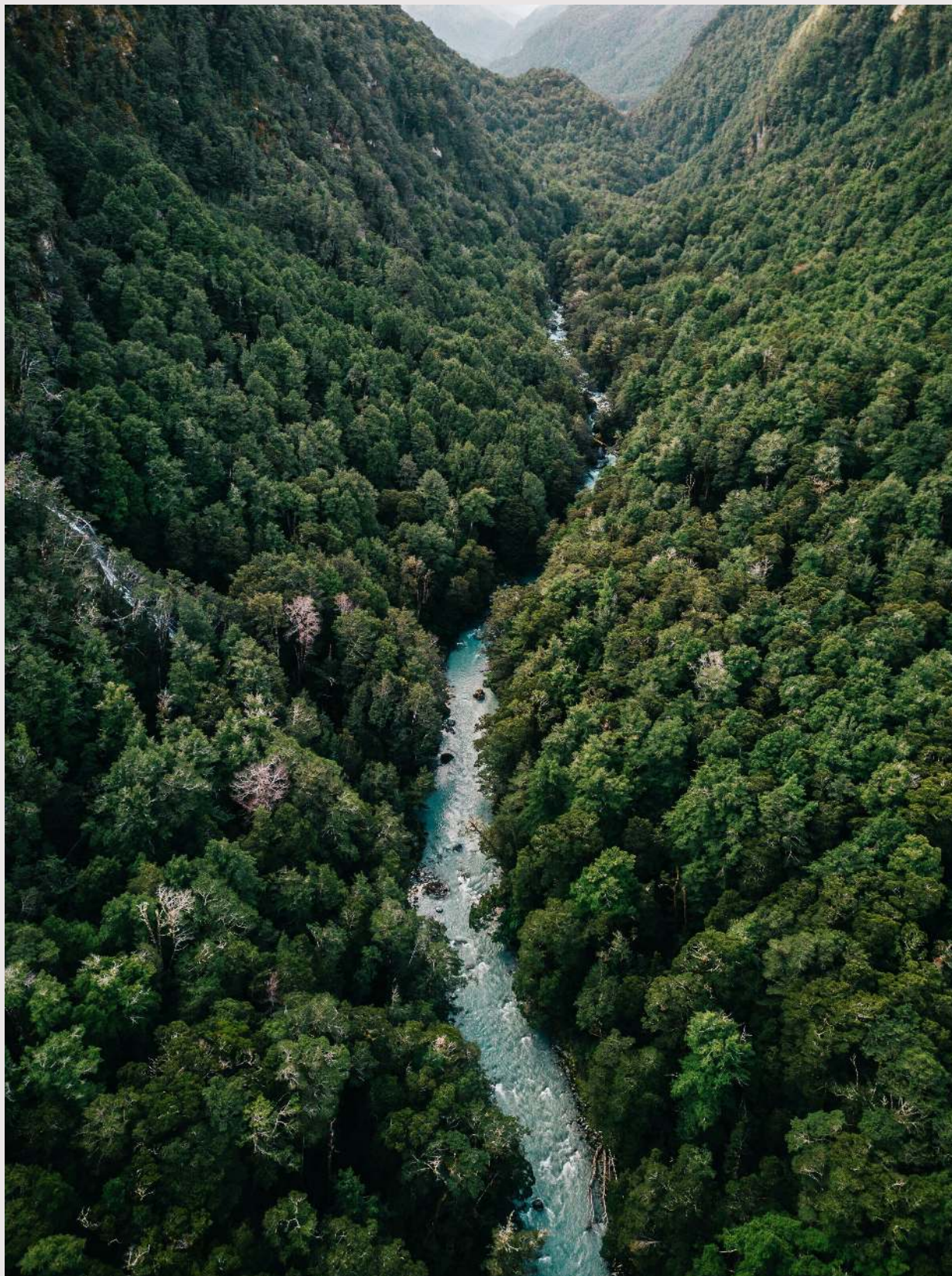
It's for others
who think they
can't write a poem
but can read
and be reminded
of nothing, in the middle
of a busy day,

and in that silence,
smile.

Based on a true story | Paul Stokstad

-For Bill Graeser

February 5, 2019



The Secret Names of the New Zealand Dead

Allaahummaghfir li (New Zealand deaths) warfa' darajatahu fil-mahdiyyeena,
wakhluḥhu fee 'aqibihi fil-ghaabireena , waghfir-lanaa wa lahu yaa
Rabbal-'aalameena, wafsaḥ lahu fee qabrihi wa nawwir lahu feeḥi

Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with
the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Al molay rachamim, shochayn bam'romim, ham-tzay m'nucha n'chona al
kanfay Hash'china, b'ma-alot k'doshim ut-horim k'zo-har haraki-a mazhirim, et
nishmat (New Zealand deaths) she-halach l-olama, ba-avur shenodvu tz'dakah
b'ad hazkarat nishmata. B'Gan Ayden t'hay m'nuchata; la-chayn Ba-al
Harachamim yas-tire-ha b'sayter k'nafav l'olamim, v'yitz-ror bitz-ror hacha-
yim et nishmatah, Ado-nay Hu na-chalatah, v'tanu-ach b'shalom al mishkavah.
V'nomar: Amayn.

Om Namo Narayana'ya, Om Namo Narayana'ya, Om Namo Narayana'ya, Om
Namo Narayana'ya, Om Namo Narayana'ya.

We hear that there are 49 dead in New Zealand

We are not given names, but a number

But even so, we invoke the secret name
of each one, the vibration, a richly contoured
sound wave, made up of places, people,
songs remembered or forgotten,
errands still to do, or done,
hopes, dreams, loves and
items in the closet, folded or not

And with that secret name
we honor you, we remember you
we thank you
for your time here with us.

We are sorry for your departure
and sorry that we never got to mention
in person, that we love you

But even so, now we send you
on your journey
wishing you rest
in light, in love, in peace.

March 5, 2019



Cat Love

Nobody loves you
and nobody can love you.

It's simply not the case
that somebody else
can slather love on
and around you
like butter, and you
are incased in it.

However, you can love
and feel love
about another
and they can feel
the same
around the topic
of you.

So when I say
I love you
(and I do by the way)
what I am really saying
is that I feel love
around you,
I am filled with love
because of you
and I am in love,
my own love,
due to you.

So, the next time you think
nobody loves me
you might ask yourself
to feel love
for yourself, because
what everyone loves
about a cat
is not so much
the cat licking
but the cat purring.

April 1, 2019

The true story

Poems, for me, come and go, like white t-shirts, needing decoration. Sometimes I will color all over all over them, with crayons. Sometimes I add stars or even bits of lace. Others start out long and full but end up in purposeful tatters, or in tiny, austere shapes. Some as if are still manifesting, or never fully exist. All end up in a closet, in a box, or maybe forgotten in a corner. A t-shirt is a modest thing - not a suit or uniform. Usually there is a reason to pick yet another up, fold it, unfold it, and feel whether it suits the feeling, whether it is right for this moment, this day. Some don't fit anymore (but I keep them). Others, on reflection, still appeal. Most were best for that time, that day. In any case, here I am, emptying out my closet. Please try some on and see if they fit for your day. Hope so.