

REMNANTS OF A LIFE

Poems

by

Duane L. Herrmann

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This is a small selection of poems from the complete book, chosen by the author for sharing with the Baha'i Library Online at bahai-library.com/herrmann_remnants_life .

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NATIVE ROOTS

My mother's father
could have been
a member of the tribe,
if the tribe
accepted great grandchildren
of full bloods,
But we don't know
their names,
not even
which tribe,
nor where
the tribe was from.
No records kept,
nor honor given
to native ancestors,
our native roots.

My history
has been erased.

WALKING HIGH

Above the fence,
old and stone,
with moss,
I see clouds
silent,
majestic ships
sailing along,
flotilla
stretching far,
and below my feet:
dirt with life –
plants, microbes,
and more,
busy, busy, busy
creating, generating,
and growing
all around me:
the world in process,
continuing
and I sing
of the glory
of all things!
And, for reprise,
I shout
exaltation
to the Heavens
of Glory!

DREAMER BOY

Farm boy sits in grass
reading
of another life,
another time,
another world.
Who might he
someday be?
Gentle breeze whispers,
“You too can do.”
He begins to hope
for a time when he can,
when his life
becomes his own,
not bound
by others’ expectations.
For now he reads –
and dreams.

KILLER BOY

By age twelve
I was expert killer:
one clean slice
through the neck,
they didn't feel a thing,
toss the body aside –
on to the next,
blood didn't bother.
Some would spasm,
others tried to run
but not for long.
I was good –
took success in stride.
It was a family pattern,
we had to kill.

Without the killing:
no fried chicken
for Sunday dinner!

FEEDING CATTLE

The day was cold
sleet was blowing
Dad was sick and asked,
“Can you feed the cattle?”
Inwardly groaning,
I wanted to be snug and read,
but said, “Yes.”
I dressed warm in layers
loaded hay and set out.
After breaking bales
and scattering the hay
I sat on the open tractor
and watched the cows
in their enjoyment,
wind and sleet forgotten.
Decades later
good memory remains.
My father died next summer.

SNOW DUSTING

A light dusting of snow
reveals contrasts:
an open, plowed field,
every furrow seen,
is more white
than a field of stubble
or pasture land
with standing grass.
Abandoned rail grade
hidden in the trees
now revealed
as a stretch of white.
So, too does goodness
contrast with evil:
as light
is most obvious
next to
darkness.

McDONALD SHEEP RANCH

Here...
in a nondescript house,
shabby, worn,
of five small rooms
“...here is the true Ground Zero,
the place
where the Manhattan Project’s
bewildering concoction
of science, bureaucracy, money
and hubris
came to its irrevocable end.”¹
The McDonalds and their sheep
to points unknown
(the sheep to slaughter, likely),
the cooling cistern caved in
and plastic covering
doors and windows:
“Please Use Other Doors!
Keep This Room Clean!”²
Signs posted
to keep out dust for death
in the room,
peeling paint
and creaking floors,
once the hearth and home,
used to assemble
the first of the line
of Fat Man and Little Boy,
pulsing, compounded darkness
of men’s hearts
where the curtain opened
to a light
famously brighter
than a thousand suns unleashed
“capable of changing the whole atmosphere
of the earth
and their contamination
would prove lethal.”³

The Age of the Destruction of Mankind,
by our own hands,
has dawned.

....

Will we rise our hearts and minds
above such destruction?
Or, let passion and pettiness
turn out the lights?

BLESSED IS THE PLACE

In a small office
a back hall,
with twists and turns,
provides a private place
for prayer, meditation and rest.

The hall was seldom used
but by one
who needed respite
from
the talking, talking, talking.

There
he walked to stretch
and prayed each day
in his three tongues:
German, English, Farsi.

He used his beads
to calm the time
and finish hours
of another day
at work.

No one else
in the office
would have guessed
this use
for the space.

He was odd,
they all knew,
but never dreamed
the transformation
to a place of prayer.

But then,
he prayed everywhere:
walking down the street,
driving,
and washing dishes too!

In his mind,
and heart and soul,
any place – and every place

is a good place
to pray.

So he prayed
in the hidden space
in the back hallway
of an office
on his lunch break.

AND, THE WORD...

In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.¹
It shall come to pass...that nation
shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war
any more.²
Make the Cause of Peace the object
of general consultation...
Establish a Union
of the nations of the World.³
In Gardens of Bliss...
No triviality will they hear therein
nor any taint of ill –
only saying, “Peace! Peace!”⁴
Ye are the fruits of one tree
and the leaves of one branch.⁵

The earth is one country
and mankind its citizens.⁶

McDonald Sheep Ranch

1. David Wojahn, “Tell me if it is too far for you,” *The American Poetry Review*, Mar/April 2010, p. 15.
2. Signs in the former living room of the McDonald home at the Trinity testing site.
3. Bahá’u’lláh, “Words of Paradise,” *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, 1973, Bahá’í World Centre, Haifa, p. 69

And, the Word...

1. John 1:1
2. Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:3.
3. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 64-66.
4. *Qur’án*, Surah 56, The Inevitable:12, 24-25.
5. Bahá’u’lláh, Tablet of Maq̄sud, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 164.
6. Bahá’u’lláh, multiple Tablets.