

Ten Prose Poems... ..

By

Jeffrey Zable

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes...* In his prose poetry, Zable graciously reminds us that futility is nothing to anguish over. It is rare that I extend such gratitude to writers of his caliber, do to my amateurish jealousies. Jeffrey serves up his take on the absurdities of life in crusty-thick slices. Just as dough rises and yeast infects, effecting affectations. To start, in 'THE OVERSIGHT,' we find him sleuthing and sloshing, in the midst of ablutions, in search of a solution, about to take a slash, he spots an unflushed turd in a friend's toilet. And with classic, tragic indecision he dithers as to whether to flush or not to blush, and send-up the offender, release and resolve the fecal matter. After some deliberation, "As I began to feel a bit embarrassed for both of them, as well as a bit / nauseous to boot, I decided to flush it down as I really needed to go" In 'A FLURRY OF MEMORIES,' Jeffrey "...sat in on conga drums with Jerry Garcia / and Merl Saunders" jamming with "a Grateful Dead." He runs "on the treadmill" spying on mismatched lovers. Has "had a few decent moments" "separated from [his angry] grandmother / in the Hall of Mirrors." Walked "along Haight Street" recalling "the great Bill Graham" and refusing "'Weed? Acid? / Mescaline?'" 'WHAT IT ALL MEANS'? Just look "at a postcard that was shot by someone at a conga drum / poetry performance in 1977." But I am over-focusing on the content. We must concentrate as much on their form—they are interesting apart from anything else, and most of the other poetry we publish for their 'prosody'. A prose poem is a unique literary confection—a child of Zeus by a mortal mother. He's also a stellar talent with an easy going sophistication sporting the best denim. It's funny how the book snaps shut / And what was scant is now a glut. Don't you just love a man who can laugh in the face of life? Zable is stabbing and able. (To maintain poet's spacing each poem is on its own page.) HS

THE OVERSIGHT

So, I was at a friend's house the other day and using their bathroom I immediately discovered a turd sitting in the bowl, and staring down at it for a moment, I pondered whether I should immediately flush the toilet to do my business or urinate on top of it before giving it a flush. I then wondered whether it was my friend's wife who forgot to flush before she left or whether it was my friend's turd sitting there. As I began to feel a bit embarrassed for both of them, as well as a bit nauseous to boot, I decided to flush it down as I really needed to go and get back to my friend who was waiting for me in the living room. And then I considered whether I should tell him what I discovered or just leave it alone, assuming that the turd sitting there was an oversight and that more than likely it rarely happened that either of them left a turd—and such a big one—sitting there like that. And so, after I flushed, did my business, and flushed again, I returned to my friend with a sly smile on my face, which he didn't seem to notice. . .

A FLURY OF MEMORIES

Even though I was telling him the truth—
that I sat in on conga drums with Jerry Garcia
and Merl Saunders one time at Merl's house—
he thought I was bullshitting, or so it seemed
because he showed no reaction. But when I went on
to say that Merl moved into the house up the street
from my parents' house; that I got to know him a bit
and played with him alone on a couple of occasions,
I became more credible as he responded, "That must
have been something, playing with two legends like that!"
To which I responded, "I really didn't think of Jerry
as a legend. To tell you the truth, I didn't care much
for his guitar playing nor was I ever a Grateful Dead fan,
whereas I thought Merl was a fine keyboard player and was
honored that he invited me to sit in with him." And it seems
so strange to think of those times, years after both of them
have been gone, both of my parents now gone, and most
of the people on the block but a flurry of memories. . .

THE RELATIONSHIP

Running on the treadmill at my gym in front of the window, I see this old guy approaching with a beautiful woman on his arm. He stops in front of the window about 7 to 10 feet away from me and not noticing me at all, or caring about anyone else walking by, he turns the woman toward him and begins kissing her.

Now he's got to be around 80 years old, a Caucasian guy who's in good shape for his age, and he looks like he could be wealthy as well.

The woman is African-- or at least she looks African to me-- and she's got to be 55 to 60 years younger than he is.

After a couple of minutes of watching him kiss and hug her, she gently pushes him a step back by putting her hand on his chest. This doesn't deter him in the least as he immediately closes the gap and begins kissing her again.

As I continue to watch, I'm feeling a bit uncomfortable for the woman thinking it was probably a desperate situation that brought them together, and at the same time I'm feeling happy for the old guy who seems to be in love.

After she pushes him a step back once again, she then takes his hand and leads him across the street, as I continue to run and simultaneously watch them until they're completely out of view. . .

BEING HERE

I surely didn't ask to be here,
and though I've had a few decent moments,
all of which might add up to the latter part of a day,
I'd more than likely have said, "Thanks, but no thanks.
I appreciate the offer, but I think you should offer it
to someone who'll be much less susceptible to it all;
someone who'll be able to roll with the punches
and laugh like they really mean it. . .
something I wouldn't be able to do. . ."

PRETTY MUCH

I still kind of remember what it felt like
getting separated from my grandmother
in the Hall of Mirrors at the Funhouse,
screaming and running around in a panic,
finally calming a bit when some nice lady
took me by the hand, said she would
take me to my grandmother who was
waiting outside, more angry than comforting,
which is pretty much how I remember her. . .

MEMORIES

I'm walking along Haight Street to the post office when some Deadhead looking guy comes up to the side of me and says, "Weed? Acid? Mescaline?" three words together that immediately remind me of the time when I used to stand in line at the original Fillmore West, waiting to get into a Friday or Saturday night show in which some guy was always walking along the line saying, "Weed? Acid? Mescaline?" And also, quite often, the great Bill Graham could be seen outside straightening out the line and telling people that the other line was for buying tickets and that the line we were in was only for those who already had tickets. And I can picture Bill's face, and remember that sometimes if I was close enough to him and if he was facing toward me, I'd say something like, "I hope it's a good show tonight, Bill!" to which he never responded, but then I seldom saw him respond to anyone, and in fact he seemed like a pretty uptight guy, but aside from that I appreciated that he produced some of the greatest music concerts that I ever saw, and it was the group, Santana, that got me interested in conga drumming and eventually Afro-Cuban folkloric music that I've been into since I was in my late teens and all I can say is that I miss those Fillmore West concerts as I used to go 2 or 3 times per month with friends and usually smoked and drank a little before a show, and now all I have are memories as I say, "No thanks!" to the Deadhead looking guy, who immediately turns and walks away, as I continue on to the post office. . .

GROUP THERAPY

I remember this woman named Melissa telling us about killing a homeless man who jumped out in front of her car. That she agonizes over it while awake and even in her dreams. That she just wishes she had seen him a split second earlier. That this experience is but one of the many things that she agonizes over.

Regarding the accident, I recall saying something to the effect that this could have happened to any one of us and that by virtue of being here and working through the pain, she was helping herself to eventually move on.

And I recollect that after I said what I said, I wondered whether I was helping myself to move on from my own personal suffering. . .

ONE TIME WHEN I WAS IN SAN JOSE COSTA RICA

I met this prostitute who was originally from Russia, and thinking it was a bit strange to meet a prostitute from Russia working in a Spanish speaking country, I told her so and little by little she told me her story, the main thrust of which was that she was 'owned' by the Russian mafia and they had her there because they thought she could make them a good deal of money because she was out of the ordinary, being a white skinned Russian woman. And she went on to tell me that she had to do so many customers per day or her life would be in danger and that the bosses only gave her enough to live--live, meaning just enough to pay for very cramped living quarters, food, and clothes which were mostly picked out for her. She said that she got caught doing this type of work in Russia and that now there was no place to hide; that if she ran away they would find her and kill her immediately. I wanted to ask her a lot more, as she seemed like a sensitive, aware person who no longer had any freedom of choice, but as I was feeling sad listening to her I decided not to. And after we said goodbye, I imagined seeking out her bosses and killing each one of them very slowly, torturing them unmercifully for what they were doing to her and no doubt to other women as well. And over the years, from time to time, I still remember her face, the sad innocence of her eyes, like an abandoned child with no place to go. . .

THE ASKING

Most all of my friends look good on paper, and with regard to Facebook some of them truly look like saints, as one is only exposed to the positive with regard to their personal relationships, community service, talents, and dedication to helping make the world a better place.

Now, of course, some of what they present is true, but mainly what gets me is that these same people are also assholes in ways that are never revealed on social media.

One who doesn't know any of these people as I do, would miss first-hand the pettiness, narrowmindedness, self-centeredness, pompousness, and general nastiness of their personalities, that easily appears when one disagrees with them or disappoints them in some way.

This is what truly astounds me, because if all you were exposed to was their resume or Facebook page, you could become quite envious to the point that you'd say to yourself, "What is wrong with me that I'm not more like them!" believing they are special in ways that completely sets them apart. . .

WHAT IT ALL MEANS

Looking at a postcard that was shot by someone at a conga drum/poetry performance in 1977 that included me, Tom Cuson, and Andrei Codrescu, I'm struck by how much hair I had then in comparison to what I have now. And though I never saw Andrei again after that gig I did follow some of his progress to stardom as a writer, commentator, and film maker. As Tom moved to Germany with his wife and became a German citizen I eventually lost contact with him, and strangely enough heard of his passing from a heart attack from a fellow poet named Kush who happened to be walking across the street while I was driving. I honked my horn, he got in the car and then told me about Tom's passing. I remember feeling shocked and saddened by the news. Kush also said there was going to be a little memorial for Tom on Friday evening, which I wound up not attending. And that was the last time I saw Kush as well. So, what does it all mean!? I don't know what it all means, but as I look at the photo of Tom, Andrei, and myself, I somehow wish I could relive some of those times, for even though they were difficult times, they were probably some of the best of my life. . .

THE POET SPEAKS:

As to the poems here, I can't say that anything in particular inspired them except that it seems that lately I've been writing more narrative poems. I'm having a lot of personal memories, which I have no doubt have been influenced by the fact that I've spent a lot more time alone during Covid, but more poignant and painful was the fact that I lost two important people in my life in 2021. My mother passed away and I lost a good friend who I'd known for many years. In general, I've been influenced by many different styles of poems and poets from many different cultures. Off the top of my head, some of the poets who have had 'poetic influence' on me include Octavio Paz, Paul Eluard, Pablo Neruda, Charles Bukowski, Russell Edson, and Mark Strand. Poetry has always been a form of therapy for me, a place in which I can explore what's inside and attempt to be as real as possible with myself. I will say that writing poetry hasn't always been cathartic, as sometimes what I've written has only led to more questions about myself-- questions that can make me feel uneasy. . . questions that lead into another poem in an attempt to make some sense of it all. . .

AUTHOR BIO: Jeffrey Zable is a teacher, conga/bongo/percussionist who plays for dance classes, rumbas, and Latin music gigs around the San Francisco Bay Area. His poetry, flash fiction, and non-fiction has appeared in hundreds of literary magazines and anthologies,

more recently in Uppagus, Raw, Phenomenal Literature, Corvus, Third Wednesday, and many others.