

Irritable Vowels

By

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*For my family,
For my friends,
and for me.*

Special thanks to Amanda Mason for reviewing my work and providing such valuable input and ideas. My poetry is better because of your suggestions. Special thanks to my son for his cover idea and support. And last but not in the least bit least, thanks to my wife for her tireless efforts in formatting this book. I am sure husbands have been killed for a lot less.

Acknowledgements:

I wish to thank E. E. Cummings, Ogden Nash, Edgar Allan Poe and Dr. Seuss for their influence on my love of poetry. I learned a great deal from each of them. Though they were all unique, I think they shared a similar ancestry of a sort that is evident within their poetry. Whether they were writing about love or sadness, good and evil, or about the world around us, each of their poems had a message. Sometimes you had to think and read the poem several times before you understood what the author was trying to say. Sometimes you cringed because you understood exactly what they were saying or were touched emotionally. Sometimes you just laughed. Regardless of the emotion or feeling, you were always transported for just a moment into another world.

E.E. Cummings is never easy to understand and I feel very inadequate to even suggest a remote relationship to any words that I have written. He had a disdain for structure and a strong desire for his work to be unlike anything anyone had ever seen before. Though some of his poems are approaching one hundred years old, he still manages to accomplish that goal. I do share his belief that poetry is a form of art and is meant to touch us on some level and, as with all art, that can mean different things to different people. His poetry has many tiers, and you can always debate what Cummings was trying to convey. I enjoy that about his work. To this day, when I read his poetry, I am still baffled at times as to what he was trying to say. I am not sure that will ever change. Edgar Allan Poe wrote many beautiful allegorical poems and there was a common theme among them - love and death. His poetry, in my opinion, was an emotional outlet for him which I believe was brought on at times by his sense of loss or joy, and by his dark moods which were often fueled by alcohol, drugs, and depression. Ogden Nash was a fun poet. His poems make me laugh and I love the quirky way that he wrote. At one time, he was one of the most read poets in America. People always like to laugh and he was very successful in making the world in which we live come alive within his poems, often making the common, uncommonly funny. And that brings me to Dr. Seuss. As I have said before, two of the greatest influences on my writing were

Dr. Seuss and Edgar Allan Poe. As a young boy, I wanted to be Dr. Seuss and wrote many poems, beginning when I was in the second grade. Dr. Seuss drove my imagination and I loved the fact he invented his own world but it was still one that we could understand. His world brought color, laughter, and meaning to young minds and that is not an easy thing to do - but he made it look easy. I think you will see elements of each writer in my poetry. I cannot but be influenced by those I admire, though I do not consider myself at any point, on any of their levels.

I truly hope I am able to touch you in some way, as you read these poems. I hope you laugh many times. I hope you find some of the words meaningful and see the heartfelt manner in which the words came together. And lastly, I hope that some of them require you to question what I was trying to say and in doing so, find that journey entertaining. This compilation of poetry would not have happened without the aforementioned, and I wish to thank them for teaching me how to paint. I'd like to think I didn't use the wrong colors too many times.

Thank you for taking the time to explore this aspect of my writing. I can promise you - I have been more surprised by it than anyone.

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A moment in time

When he asked the question,
His button nose crinkled.

“Why is it grandpa, your skin is so wrinkled?”

I smiled and looked in his brown eyes,
and sighed as I lifted him on my lap.
“Well, grandchild, this old skin’s been out there
In a baking sun, working on the farm,
In the garden and the barn.

And just over time, living makes it so,
that your skin, gets more thin,
and doesn’t seem to grow
back as well as it used to.”

“Oh,” he said and nodded his bushy head.

And then he looked up again into my face,
And though cloudy, I could see a trace,
Of another question forming.

“Why is it grandpa, your eyes look so glassy and so gray?”

I smiled and looked in his brown eyes,
and sighed, as I shifted him from one knee to the other.
“Well grandchild, these old eyes, they’ve seen the world
for close to ninety years,
and I’ve looked at men with courage
and looked at men with fear,
and laughed with both and even shed a tear.
I’ve read a thousand books, the Bible every day,
I’ve seen the world around me dotted with
a million bales of hay.
And with all that seeing, that I’ve gotten done,
Well, grandson, sometimes your eyes become
like glass and just a little gray.”

“Oh,” he said and nodded his bushy head.

And then I looked away for a moment,
And wondered where I was just then.

Before I heard an angel’s voice, talk to me again.

“Why is it grandpa, you sometimes can’t remember?”

I smiled and looked in his brown eyes,
and sighed as I ran my hand through his bushy hair.

“Well grandchild, sometimes as you get older,
Your mind gets weighted down, because of
all the memories on your shoulders.

And sometimes we forget a name or two,
or a place or few.

But I promise you, even though things may never be the same,
I won’t ever forget those brown eyes or my grandson’s name.”

“Oh,” he said and nodded his bushy head.

And he smiled as he hugged me.

And my grandchild said he loved me.

And for a moment in time, they both saw the face of heaven.

Best Friend

I can feel her heart beating against my leg.
This gentle soul is less than genteel when she sleeps.
 She growls without malice.
 Her body twitches.
Her legs and feet move as she runs
 through her dreams.
And I sit there wide awake and look
 down at her, and try to imagine
 how the muted color palette
 within her dreams,
reflects such a beautiful world.

Tequila

I've had Tequila
in a tiny little glass,
after many, I couldn't see ya,
and fell upon my ass.

I won't do that anymore,
no matter where we go,
even if the store,
discounts Jose Cuervo.

An old empty pickle jar

Firefly glowing in my jar,
How I wonder what you are.
Glowing there within the night,
Blinking on and off so bright.

Are they fairies, or little sprites?
Dancing all about the night.
Tell me Dad, what do you know?
About these little things that glow.

“It’s not a fly at all. It’s a beetle.
Order: Coleoptera.
Family: Lampyridae.
Genus: Anadrilus, Araucariocladus,
Crassitarsus, Lamprigera,
Oculogryphus, Photoctus,
and Pollaclasis.”

Well shit.
Knowledge is sometimes tragic.
When it takes away the magic.

Coffee

I wonder if many
people would drink
coffee if there wasn't a
caffeine buzz within the
hot liquid which is
dark black
or various
colors of brown and
sometimes cold?

I wonder if many
people would still drink
coffee if they knew
what their breath smelled
like after they have had
one cup or two?

I wonder if many
people would still
have a morning
bowel movement
without their cup of
coffee?

When you are retired
you wonder about these
types of things.

Jingle Sales

I love the sound of Jingle Bells
Sung with voices low and high!
I love the sights and all the smells,
Of Christmas season coming nigh.

December 1, the season starts,
I see the wreaths and smell the pine.
I stop at shops and fill my cart,
And wish good cheer to thee and thine.

But then I see it's November,
And Christmas trees are in the stores.
And I say, don't you remember
Thanksgiving Day comes before?

And before I blink, it's October,
when I see the Christmas lights,
and I wonder if I am sober,
when goblins now are Christmas sights.

And why is now Christmas season
Beginning in mid -September?
Isn't this a bit pre-season?
Since it's 3 months from December!

I love the sounds of Jingle Bells
Sung with voices sweet and gay!
But everyone can go to Hell,
When Christmas trees come in May.

Smokes

Smoking will kill you.
The warnings are there.
But I liked the smoke
Within the air.
The problem is
My lungs did not.
And so now, I've got
A lung disease -
C.O.P.D.

C.O.P.D.
Sounds like a cop show.
But unfortunately, no.
It's a way you know
Your lungs don't blow
In and Out
Like they should.

When you smoke and you are young
You seldom think about your lungs.
But I have to admit, I did.
I just didn't want to quit,
Because smoking wasn't choking, to me;
It was a measured pleasure and calming to me.
And though they were nice, I paid the price.

End stage C.O.P.D means the deed is done.
because eventually both your lungs
won't move enough up and down
so your next stop, is the ground.
Or on top of the ground or water if
You choose cremation.
(which is the opposite of creation.
you know, dust to dust)
And thus is thus.

But before my last breath,
Where I cough and choke,
I'd like to have
a few more
smokes.

I'm not sure

I got up in the middle of the night
To get a glass of water.
I didn't turn on the kitchen lights.
I saw no need to bother.

As I stood there in the dark,
And took several icy drinks,
I heard a cough.
Which made me stop and think.

I looked into the living room,
And the shapes upon the chair,
Looked human in their form,
As I wondered who was there.

But then I saw the outline,
Of the pillows and the chair,
And I laughed about my mind,
And what I thought was there.

I took a few more drinks,
And started down the hall,
As I began to think,
Was that a cough at all?

And then I heard a sound,
And thought I felt a stare,
And quickly turned around,
To see only darkness in the air.

So, I got back into my bed,
And turned the light back off,
And as the pillow felt my head,
I heard a cough.

Silent Night

His bed looked empty.
The other 99 beds in the
Cavern of unanswered echos,
they called a ward,
Were full.
Sickness stained the walls,
and permeated the air like
smoke and soldiers
Were dying.
No one should die
In a place like that;
even if there are
99 other brothers at
Your side.
I have never felt so
Helpless in my entire life;
though I hid behind a
statue-like face of
composure.
I know I projected
that demeanor for her.
But perhaps, I did it for him too.
To let him know, I would be okay.
48 years later, I'm better.
In fact, you could say I am okay.
But I still see him in that bed;
And I still remember how
Empty I felt.

The Hospital

The hospital is a scary place
For those that don't work there.
I worked there for 40 years,
And I saw the fear in the face
Of patients and family members
And friends who were there.

You could see the apprehension
In their eyes.
And there was no way to disguise
The way they truly felt.

Fear of the unknown.
Fear of the known.
Anger at an inability
To control their own life,
Or body.
Sadness of the diagnosis.
Restrained relief of the prognosis.

The hospital is a scary place,
When you're the patient.
And it's amazing how
When you demonstrate patience,
And compassion,
And a friendly smile,
And helpful manner;
How much more powerful all that is,
Than the hospital's many scanners.

The scanners diagnose hope.
When there's empathy that helps
one cope with the illness.

I can't tell you how many times,
Someone I was interviewing,
Told me that they pursued a career
In healthcare, for many years.
And sometimes there were tears.
Because one time when they were ill,
Someone nice gave them more than
just a pill, and helped them
overcome their disease.

Or demonstrated kindness
With their science,
to a Parent or a Loved One.
And they always remembered
that Someone's Name.

I always hired that person
to fill an open spot
and always got,
not an employee,
but a Caregiver.

I think in order to work in the hospital,
you should be a patient first.
But of course, that isn't possible.

But what is possible,
Is Going To Work With Passion
And Compassion.
And Knowing
What You Are Doing,
Is Pursuing Something Noble.

There are no jobs in the hospital.
Only patients, who are scared,
And those who truly care.