

Echoes on a Rippling Pond
Poems from Thailand 1983-4
by Teri Ekland



I wrote these poems during my year at the Prince of Songkhla University in the Malay Muslim fishing town of Pattani, southern Thailand. While teaching English I also pursued a tourist business on a southeastern island called Lamsom. It was a balancing act that I wrote about in my memoir “Moonbeams in Asia.” When I first arrived, the university housed me in a fifth story apartment by a marsh near Rusembilan village where the Malaysian fishermen built colorful boats called kolacks.



This is a picture of kids from Rusembilan. Behind them is a kolack.

The Kolack

Beached along the shore –
(since I’ve been away)
rests an old Kolack boat –
whose wood has turned to gray.
“Remember me? I’m still alone –
and growing old.

My year in Thailand was difficult. I was a contract lecturer earning more money than the Thai professors who had been at the university for many years. Some professors resented me because “what you earn is who you are.” And the Thai culture is a status conscious culture. My directness did not sit well either in this soft-spoken indirect culture. Extreme culture shock rattled my mind and echoes in many of these poems. Professors would shun me unless I was in the presence of the Fulbright scholars who they had no animosity toward because they weren’t paid by the university (view my poems “Desultory Witch” and “I Met a Woman Unaware.”)



Prince of Songkhla University, PSU, was up against a marshland before the Gulf of Siam. There was a road along the marsh with lots of flattened frogs that the students and teachers had run over on their motor scooters, the main form of transportation to and from campus and around Pattani. Often, I would sit before the vast marshland to absorb the tranquility and beauty surrounding me. During one sunset, this first poem I offer popped into my head.

Phantoms of the Marshland

Phantoms of the Marshland
Evading to be seen
Leaving trails – glimpses
Demarcating where they’ve been.

By way of fading marsh’s gleam,
In splash! A phantom shown.
What mystery behooves my soul –
Taut hours away from home?

Phantoms of the Marshlands –

I know not why you be –
Before I ever grasp you –
You're snatched away from me.

(Meaning 2022): For a long time, I've attributed this poem to dreams I have that slip away as soon as I wake up, although I offer a different interpretation in my "Family Secret's" collection of poems. I'm not sure if it's normal for a person to constantly dream all night long, but I do. Whenever I wake, it's always from a dream unless I awake from a colonoscopy blackout. And usually, I don't remember much about the dream. It seems I have a very active mind, always in thought. That's why these days I am satisfied meditating each morning and quieting my mind and staying calm. "To survive, I must be calm" is one of my mottos.

"What mystery behooves my soul taught hours away from home." I think this line means that dreams are places away from home, from our awakened conscious state of mind. We can't quite grasp what lies in this mysterious place, the deeper realm of the mind, the dream state of consciousness. Or is it subconsciousness? Well, I do think this poem is almost self-explanatory.

Phantom Good-Night

Phantom good-night
Go away!
Already
You've called
Twice
In one day.

Phantom good-bye,
I care not for
Intrusions,
I've no time for
Illusions.

Good-night,
I say,
Phantom,
Will you please
Go away?

Unlike the previous poem, I imagine this one has to do with recurring mental hang-ups, negative thoughts, (dysfunctions from childhood) that we never quite let go. “No time for illusions” is a great line because these “phantom” negative thoughts cause delusion, which causes suffering, at least, it’s been the cause of my primary discomforts in life.

Morass of the Morning

Morass of the Morning –
Mynahs, four, are calling –
Out –
From golden Narcissus:
Holding together a Rippling Pond.

One –
Has a whistle –
An echoing tune –
(those leaves of the Eucalyptus
are green crescent moons.)

On my way to the English department, I rode my bicycle beside several canals, ponds, and sea marshes. One morning I saw a python, another time a monitor lizard, and most mornings I saw and heard Mynahs and sun birds. I usually stopped to take in the scene.

(Meaning to me now 2022): Again, this seems to be about the mind, about the levels of consciousness, subtle and deep. “Morass of the morning” probably has to do with the entanglement of thoughts that are often confused, as if in a quagmire. I don’t know why there are four Mynahs calling out from Narcissus. A deeper consciousness is calling to me. Narcissus rejected the nymph Echo and fell in love with his own reflection in the pond. This poem should be self-explanatory but here is my take. When our mind is focused on the self, self-centeredness, we lose touch with reality. We cannot obtain clarity of mind. We drown in our own ego. Going deeper from this surface self-consciousness, we hear echoes, Echo, from the subconscious mind that breaks through the surface ego and makes us more realistic. Reality is far beyond the ego.

“Holding together a rippling pond” must mean that deeper consciousness, non-ego, keeps us from drowning. Holds us together, despite the ego’s non-reality. “The rippling pond” is perhaps two things. The pond is all of consciousness, the mind, and the rippling is possibly the ego’s disturbances over what is real. With an egotistical surface consciousness that offers us nothing but non-reality (delusion), our calm pond (total mind) is agitated and unclear.

“One has a whistle, an echoing tune” is what I really heard from these four mynahs. Maybe it means the deepest level of consciousness awakes us with a whistle that echoes through our thoughts. “Those leaves of the Eucalyptus are green crescent moons.” Maybe this means that our sight sees what the mind makes it see. Often non-reality. We liken this to that and make conclusions that are delusional, although quite pretty and poetic.

At last, I must say that analyzing a simple poem like this ends up sounding like a lot of mumbo jumbo. The simplicity of the poem should speak for itself. Then it’s pretty and clean. All this analysis is a bit convoluted but perhaps necessary to understand the deeper meaning of a simple literary poem of imagery.

Mynahs on a Fallen Palm

Mynahs on a fallen palm,
Above the lily pads,
Watching –
Making like they know,
Who I am.

Frogs of the marshland,
Guffawing at the monsoon,
Then humming when I pass by.

Sunbirds in the bottlebrush,
Asking, “Where you go?”
(please let me slip by quietly –
and head on unopposed.)

(Meaning 2022): This poem is both literal and literary. It's what I saw and experienced in Thailand. Almost always when I went to Pattani town or walked around campus young Thai men would say "Hey you! Where you go?" Sometimes I encountered some young man from the university who might say hello and I'd ignore him thinking he was just another random dude saying "Where you go" then the sensitive Thai would think I was a rude person and so on. What a conundrum it was. This poem is the third in marshland, pond poems that give this compilation of poetry its title "Echoes on a Rippling Pond."

"Mynahs on a fallen palm" perhaps means the subconscious deeper mind calling to my subtle conscious surface mind about past actions that have fallen, or didn't work out, didn't properly manifest into clarity of mind, a clear and calm pond. "Making like they know, who I am" seems literal. Is this my deeper mind challenging my surface ego mind? The ego mind fighting the deeper mind's wisdom? It's the subtle ego mind who is talking. I would say the deeper mind has a better grasp on the reality of who I am than the ego subtle mind. But the subtle mind fights and rejects the deeper wisdom because it's comfortable with its shallowness and patterns of behavior. The frog verse is literal and I don't know what the literary meaning could be. Except, they are laughing at the storm, the chaos of my mind? The monsoon. "Humming when I go by" seems to mean not challenging my ego mind. The frogs first laugh at the stormy chaos but stop when I go by. Who are the frogs? The mynahs I've already decided are a deeper consciousness. Perhaps the frogs are "in between consciousness," that is, between deeper wisdom and shallow ego thought. They are of the marshland, the wasteland, the vast expanse of wilderness rather than on the pond of the total mind like the mynahs.

And the last stanza was how I felt when constantly accosted with "where you go?" On the literary level, again, perhaps the deeper mind is challenging the subtle ego speaker, and the ego

resists and doesn't want to be bumped from her comfort zone. Leave me alone, wise deeper self. Let me be as I am, shallow and delusional. Sunbirds in the bottlebrush is literal. Probably has a literary meaning, like the frogs. Three animals, three points of mind addressing the ego self. Deepest level, the mynahs calling, mid-level the frogs laughing then humming, and the sunbirds directly asking me what I'm up to. What is the ego mind trying to accomplish with its delusions? Where is this ego going to end up? In a wasteland like the frogs? Sunbirds are happy creatures in lovely trees edging the pond. Time to leave this simple poem alone and move on. Too much thought can destroy the beauty of a poem's imagery and allusions.



Patterns in My Mind written 8-28-84 (a favorite poem)

Seldom enough do I watch the setting sun.
Today I've arrived
Where the distant sea
Meets a muddy marsh
That stretches to me,
And beyond me –
All around me.
I've arrived in time to view
The glowing yellow sun
Bounce light off minute waves –
Patterns in my mind.

Swallows are black.
They clutter the sky, at times,
Like flying ashes from a
Newspaper bonfire –
Like patterns in my mind.

A sea kite glides in the air,
Majestically,

Unlike the swallows.
I'm not sure
For what he searches—
But he knows
The patterns in my mind.

And cirrus clouds wisp from
A point of sun —
Soft and mellow —
A creamy subtle color.
They are exaggerated
Reflections of the
Minute waves.

The sun takes a while to set
When you arrive at full glow.
But when it does
It goes quickly,
Leaving a fading past.
They go to sleep a while
These patterns in my mind.

(Meaning 2-21-2022): A poem that is both literal and deeply literary. I'm sure I really sat before the sea at sunset and this poem came to me. It almost seems self-explanatory, except for a few lines. "Seldom enough do I watch the setting sun" means I am now having a deep reflection. The brilliance of my mind (not that I'm brilliant, but the "human mind" in general is a brilliant magnificent reality of existence) explores even the most minute details of my intelligence, of my patterns of thinking, of recurring thoughts, past thoughts, thoughts of future possibilities. The mind, like the sun, illuminates everything. And at the time it's setting, or delving deeply into consciousness both subtle and primordial, the illumination brings out contrasts and variations that don't exist at full noontime sunshine. We see the patterns of our thought when we achieve deeper reflection. "Ashes from a newspaper bonfire" and fluttering swallows seems to indicate a head filled with the world's news of the day, of the past. So much information is fluttering

around in the mind like the black swallows in the sky at the time of diminishing light. Too much information. Too much thought. How can we be calm and at peace with so much ash and flutter?

Then a single magnificent bird soars in the air and takes all my attention away from the clutter. Who is he? Why is it I don't know what he searches for? Is this my most majestic and deepest form of consciousness? And is that form really searching for truth. Or does my subtle consciousness merely assume that every part of my mind is in search of something. Something better. Something more promising. "He knows the patterns of my mind" means this majestic deep form of consciousness is aware of my entire mind and my entire way of thinking about myself and my existence. He doesn't need to search for anything, like the subtle mind, he is simply aware of who he is.

Cirrus clouds coming from the setting sun are "exaggerated reflections of the minute waves" talked about in the first stanza where the setting sun "bounces off the minute waves." This seems to mean, to me, that when I begin the process of deep reflection, the brilliant mind, as a whole, exposes the details of deeper consciousness, but in a subtle way. The deeper mind isn't grandiose or bombastic. It is more like minute waves of the subconscious mind that come to the surface mind in spectacular, exaggerated ways. This is how my mind works. How poems came to my head. I wouldn't generalize because I'm no psychologist or omniscient god. And I will not claim I'm "special" because such convictions only lead to becoming trapped in self-centeredness. Or trapped in being incompetent and inept. I wouldn't wish that on anyone, let alone on myself. Perhaps I am just more in touch with my deeper mind, with my deepest levels of thought and they get exaggerated in my more superficial thoughts and become images of beautiful nature that becomes the words of poetry. I would never try to construct an ugly poem. I don't know why people let their minds go to such dark forlorn places, why they lock themselves

away and sulk. Maybe it's because they've been told that's what people with their afflictions do. I find the whole charade silly and I want to slap these people and say, get a grip. Forget about all the ills of the world and delve deeply into the majestic and beautiful gifts we have, as human beings. The gifts of life and of a consciousness that can contemplate and rationalize and make our existence more than just mere animalistic survival. Beautiful patterns of the mind make our existence a wonderful place to be.

She calls before the sea

She calls before the sea,
“Please bear for me this heart,
For you, I’ll set it free,
But let me then depart.”

The sun had left,
An hour past,
And took away the key,
That locks the moon
Beyond the shore
Along with Mercury.

And then the sea grows silent
To gather up her heart –
But reconnoiters in violence,
Before she can depart.

(Meaning 2-21-2022): An interesting poem and good follow up to “patterns of my mind.” Obviously, the speaker is depressed. “She calls before the sea” could be she calls on god, or on the sea of suffering, of life, because she wants something higher than herself to take away her pain “bear her troubled heart, her emotions.” But she doesn’t want to kill herself. She just wants the sea or god to take away her suffering and grief. Then she wants to get on with her life.

The next stanza describes an hour past sunset when it’s dark because the moon is gone “locked beyond the shore” along with Mercury, the god of change? Of transformation? Leading souls to the afterlife. Messenger god. But he is also locked away with the moon. He is not

available to her, the subject of the poem. “The sun took away the key” her own brilliant mind keeps her from ending her suffering. It’s something she alone can do but she doesn’t realize this until, perhaps, it’s too late.

Sun is the brilliant mind. Moon is the reflective mind. The sea is existence. This is getting too analytical and taking away from the simplicity and beauty of the poem.

Nevertheless, here’s my take on the last stanza “and then the sea grew silent, to gather up her heart, but reconnoiters in violence, before she can depart.” Is this my own poetic statement of a person who can’t get a grip over their pain and suffering and end up committing suicide? What seems to be going on is that for a moment there is silence or deep consideration of how she can end her suffering. But she thinks too long and hard and considers violence as her only way out. Suicide is a terribly selfish, egocentric, and violent act. And those who cannot get a grip and get over delusion, self-centeredness, egoism, and the like in order to end their suffering, commit such a violent act. That’s just my take because I do not accept the labels imposed upon people who have a different manner of thinking or have more difficulty digging themselves out of the rabbit hole of delusion. I think this poem is such a person’s last call for help before they commit the ultimate act of violence against the self and the precious gift of existence. A Bodhisattva cares, aspires to help all sentient beings, but she/he cannot be soft about such foolish actions. Hard Love is sometimes needed. A sharp and swift slap in the face and the words “Get a grip and get out of your self-centered focus.”

A personal note: I have never become so forlorn that I actually wanted to end it all. However, I can think of three times where I danced with this notion. HS was the worst time of my life. My mother used to say, “these are the best days of your life” which goes to show how in sync we were. Not! See my novel “And You Learn How to Kill” and my memoir “Law School

High” to understand my depths of despair during HS. Perhaps it was junior year that I swallowed a handful of aspirin. Don’t remember what I was thinking but the only outcome was that my ears rang for days afterward. Then, while I was in the Army, the troops practically shoved drugs down my throat. Mandrix, they called them. I went to a psychiatrist and he gave me Lithium and one night I took Mandrix and Lithium and OD’d. They took me to the hospital where I spent the night. But I don’t believe this was an attempt on my life. It was just a time of horrible chaos and confusion--chaos in the environment, confusion about myself. The third time was more deliberate. My current relationship has been volatile and abusive because the spouse is filled with anxiety, anger, hatred, misogyny, at his worst times. Seven or eight years ago, he got to me so badly, I took a handful of my mental health meds, whatever they were. (I quit taking them altogether perhaps soon after this incident and began my journey of self-recovery from delusion into clarity of mind). Anyway, I probably did this to alarm the spouse but it made him angrier at me. He took me to the emergency room and they kept me overnight. It was a horrible self-inflicted experience, staying in the hospital, and I told myself, never again. Perhaps this was one of the hiccups in my developing a more realistic knowledge about myself and my mental health. An awakening from delusion. I never really wanted to end it all because I have too much to live for, too much to offer the world. Now the next poem, “Courageous Rocks” is about not falling into the rabbit hole of despair.



She Stands upon Courageous Rocks

She stands upon courageous rocks,
A green sarong around her breasts,
A woven palm hat shades her
Gathered face.

Five hours fishing into a
Breaking surf where
Granite boulders have deep crevices,
Where a thousand sand crabs
Hide, like wishes of an age ago.

She fishes alone
Upon courageous rocks.
Never a word
For herself or for the sea.

She is a silent dreamer
Escaping remembered moments.
Her coal eyes bear down
On the sun's reflection.
She covers her shoulders
With a cotton shall; it has a patch.

She waits alone with
Two bamboo poles
And her empty basket.
She sees only the fish on her line,
Filling the basket,
Frying in her pan
Over a coal flame.
(Although she could sell them

in tomorrow's market, but)

Tomorrow isn't seen,
Yesterday's forgotten,
And the mid-day sun
Would take her
But she's already done.

She fishes alone
Upon courageous rocks,
In a green sarong,
And doesn't notice the tar
Between nude bathers' toes.

(Meaning 2-22-2022: This looks like an auspicious date. I'm up at 2 AM listening to Swami Sarvapriyananda about the essence of Vedanta. Love him. He's so very cute). About this poem. It is both literal and literary. I wrote it while on Ko Samui with Martha Marino. I saw this Thai woman standing on the rocks along the shore, in a sarong, with a bamboo pole, and a basket beside her. She inspired this poem which presumably popped from my mind. A natural literary occurrence. Courageous Rocks speak for themselves, especially after the previous poem (she calls before the sea) where the speaker is obviously distraught enough to contemplate suicide. Like me, I'm sure this woman has had a difficult life. Probably lots of demands were made of her in a patriarchal misogynistic world. "Gathered face" means she's old. I was quite young, perhaps 27, when I wrote this poem. "Granite boulders have deep crevices, Where a thousand sand crabs hide, like wishes of an age ago." Deep crevices like her gathered face, weathered with time; she had aged and knows about life. Her hopes and dreams of long ago are hidden past thoughts in her memory. Fishes alone. Stands up on her own. Knows her own mind. Never a word for herself or the sea. She doesn't complain about her life. Doesn't have regrets which would play in her mind and echo troubling thoughts. Doesn't harbor feelings of jealousy, hatred, revenge, etc. Her mind is still, calm, and without the chatter, chaos, and commotion of delusional people.

“She is a silent dreamer” emphasizes her still mind. Why a dreamer? Because she still has thoughts and those are probably about catching a big fish. But she escapes remembered moments, doesn’t think about her past and isn’t bothered by any troubling events in her life. Her eyes bear down on the sun’s reflection. She’s strong, courageous, and conquers all the troubling, chaotic, delusional thoughts of the mind, the brilliant sun. The patch is another image of her age and perhaps poverty or simple life.

She sees only fish on her line, her thoughts, dreams, are focused on the practical, the real, what she’s doing and what she will do with the results of her activity of catching fish. She’s stoic, courageous, but not without thoughts and dreams of possibilities. It’s what makes us, her, me, you, human.

“Tomorrow isn’t seen.” Why do I say this when I just said she’s thinking about what she’ll do with her catch. Because she knows, in her courageous wisdom, that what will happen is only a dream, a possibility. No one knows the future although we hope for a promising one. It’s the stability of a focused and non-delusional mind. This is emphasized by “yesterday’s forgotten” which I’ve already explained. Upon courageous rocks you don’t dwell on past haunts and troubles, not even on bad karma. Why? Because such reflection is nothing but destructive. Mid-day sun, mind at its most brilliant, when its rays would burn her up. Take her. Destroy her? But she’s already done. She’s beyond subjecting herself to such blinding destructive thinking and delusion. She’s done with being young, naïve, and burdened by past or future delusions. By any chaotic or confusing thoughts about herself, her true nature, about reality.

“And she doesn’t notice the tar between nude bathers’ toes.” In the setting where I wrote this poem there were Western tourists sunbathing in the nude and there were clumps of tar washed ashore obviously from some tanker polluting the sea. The woman doesn’t notice this

because she is focused on what she's doing and isn't aware of vast changes in her world that are perhaps troubling or outlandish. I don't know. But the courageous rocks are about having focus without delusion; without letting the world and all its defiled foibles trouble you.



A Sherbet Flavored Sunset

It's a sherbet flavored sunset
In scoops of hard ice cream,
With yellow – cotton candy – pink,
And marmalade between.



Stopping for the moment (a favorite poem)

Stopping for the moment
Can only be done
When time is still.

It's the little things –
You see –
Coffee with a friend, the landscape,
An empty thought,

Empty time.

Stopping for the moment,
Can only be done,
When thoughts are cleared.
And then,
In the wake,
(observeth me)
I am alone
Yet,
Surrounded by the sea.

(Meaning 2-22-2022): This poem, which I probably wrote in view of the vast sea, is again about being alone. Seems to be a recurring theme. Why? Because in finding mental clarity I've realized that the philosophy I formulate, adhere to, is entirely of my own making. I am not a follower of one specific Lord or guru. I follow the teachings of my own mind. I awaken into the reality that I alone can fix myself, not some psychiatrist, or spouse, or parent, or friend. No one will ever know me better than I can know myself. That's why I ultimately rejected religion and subjugating myself to a spouse. That proved ridiculous, unfulfilling, and it did not bring about any clarity of mind. In fact, it clouded my mind with maxims that never really made sense to me, probably all my life. Patriarchy doesn't suit me. I am a human being first, not a vessel or an underling of anyone else. All human beings, including the Dalai Lama, are fallible beings. Including myself and my approaches to life and my thinking processes. So, I have to get a grip in order to discern what is real about myself and about the world. I've never experienced the supernatural, the magical, except in what's coincidental and poetic. Images, visions, literature, and poems are my mystical experiences. I never experienced a rapture about a savior. That's my reality. But when I gained focus and clarity and understood myself as a being in this world, and shed regrets and dislikes for those I felt wronged me, I found peace. It's so Buddhist. Maybe Vedantic.

“Empty thought, empty time” means no reflection on the past, no imagination about the future, and certainly no subscribing to the conditionings, labels, and negative degrading definitions imposed upon us by others in the world (by spouses, friends, society, doctors. . .)

This poem is about living in the moment and enjoying the things of the moment, daily simple things of life. That’s the awakening which we do alone and through our own efforts. But when we do awaken (in the wake) we realize that we may be alone in our efforts for self-realization, yet, but, we are connected to all the world, to everyone else, to universal consciousness. We are immersed in it. We are surrounded by the sea.

Midnight Fallen

By every midnight fallen,
Wee hours left for sleep,
I wake to see a little star
Into my bedroom creep.

She calls me through the window,
Then taps me on the nose,
And by the fact I see her
I know the morning grows.

When I wake to rooster’s call,
While morning’s at her churn,
I’m hoping that a little star
Tomorrow will return.

When I first arrived in Pattani to work at Prince of Songkhla they put me in a fifth story apartment (on stilts by the marsh). For several mornings I awoke looking out the window in the darkness before dawn and saw the same bright star. I must have asked myself what star or planet it was, but I don’t recall that now. It was simply a bright star. This poem needs no analysis. It seems literal.



A walk in Bangkok

Two feet are sore,
From midday's beat
A tropical downtown
Exhausting its heat.

The bus was crammed,
The 'jams were slow,
Where only the chary
Pedestrians go.

Meat markets sweat
Uncongenial smells,
But soon I reach flowers
An old woman sells.

Why do I continue?
I have nothing left to buy
And the street is all an unjust rule
Of chaos passing by.

Still, I stretch on walking
For the possibility,
That something worth my effort,
Waits beyond, in front of me.

(Meaning 2022): This poem seems mostly literal and self-explanatory. It's exactly what I did and what happened.



Absolutely and Of course

Absolutely!
(and of course)
what do you think I meant?
(The paths have all been flooded –
by you alone, and yet . . .)

Absolutely and forever,
Never on today,
And if you had a boat to row –
You'd find no time to stay.

I'm not sure who I had in mind as with many TL poems. Francois, past, future boyfriends? I wrote several poems with Francois in mind. He was the boyfriend I left back in Portland, an ESL student of mine, when I went to Asia. He was strikingly handsome, French, and perhaps thirty years older than me. He and I had a wild time together for a few months. I base my character in my novel "Guardian of the Maya Tree" on him. (see further commentary about this poem in my collection "Family Secrets.")

This poem may have come about after a monsoon in Pattani when all the paths on the PSU campus were flooded. Maybe it's a poem about taking a stand and telling someone off who wronged the speaker. Who doesn't understand the speaker (what do you think I meant?). Maybe it's about the leaches in the world who cling to people, use them, and won't leave as long as they're benefiting from the person they cling on to.

Notes that now pretend to be (probably to Francois after he wrote me a letter)

An age ago I gave to thee

Notes that now pretend to be.

Behind the door scathes away
Forgotten moments of that day.

Now, of late, I hear from you,
Who hasn't changed from old to new –
Who wants to change from old to new.
I'm through.

A Desultory Witch

You say she's very nice
(but have you seen her twice?)
She's a desultory witch!
(when she makes her switch).

But you are right –
Of time, at most, she wears a smile
(from which behind her charms compile).

This poem is about the four witches--four jealous Thai teachers. The Thai are status conscious and I walked into the English department earning more pay as a foreign contract teacher than these four established women. One was even related to the king. In TL, more pay means higher status. These four women were very two-faced to me. They shunned me unless I was with someone important.

A Woman Unaware (another poem I sent to my sister and one about the four witches.)

I met a woman unaware
of a spider in her hair.
It dangled down an inch above
a speckled brooch she wore for love.

I greeted her with due effort,
then caught her smiling
in retort.
Not there being one word said
her hair became the spider's web.

It was you!

It was you
Who slammed the cellar door,
thought not about the key,
Then tried to talk about yourself,
Forgetting there was me.

And it was you
Who broke the window pane,
Not thinking of the glass,
(and as my blood dripped to the floor,
you utterly would laugh.)

Yes, it was you
Who stood beneath the beam
In want of my support
(and will you ever realize)
it's me who has retort.

(Meaning 2-18-2022): This is another poem I sent to my sister. I believe it's self-explanatory. Perhaps it's also about my current difficult relationship with a man who has a short fuse. For nearly twenty years, I was under the delusion that something was mentally wrong with me. This is a poem of self-reckoning.

Old Boats

Old boats –
I see,
Old boats,
Decaying along the shore.
Resting,
Entirely, eternally,
Until they blend
With colors of the sea:
Eternity,
Old Boats,
Entirely of themselves –
An old fisherman's memory.

(Meaning 2-22-2022): about growing old.

Along familiar Urban Road

Along familiar Urban Road

I pass a quarry and a pond.
Morning light refracts,
Gravel absorbs –
A place to rest, a place to catch –
Early morning hours.

Upon the stones – small, obscure –
Rests a puppy:
Rabbit size: white with rust spots
(rusty with bleached blotches).
Tender eyes once begged
for just a little more.

((how life clings to life))
If only she had lived
Beyond the morning hours,
Just a little more.

Now at rest she absorbs
The glow of the early morning sun.

(Meaning 2-18-2022): A poem that literally happened and one that seems quite literary.

From my flat about a mile from the PSU gates, I rode a bicycle past this quarry. I don't know if I actually saw the puppy here but I do have a story to tell. Staying at the PSU campus guesthouse was a married couple who were Fulbright scholars. The four witches loved them because their salaries were paid by Fulbright. Anyway, I was visiting them one day and this little puppy was hanging around their flat. It was obviously starving. The Fulbright woman said it had been hanging around for a while. "Aren't you going to feed it?" I asked. "Oh well," the woman said. "It's going to die anyway." She made me sick and I took the puppy back to my flat, tried to feed it, but the poor puppy didn't make it. I was deeply touched; and quite put off by the Fulbright couples' indifference. Most Thai people would take such an animal to a temple where the monks would feed it. I think this story may have inspired my poem.

Deception is not harmony

Deception is not harmony,

These facts of you – I don't agree.

And who-by-god,
Did you think I was?
To follow ways of your because?

Your language lacks my
Taste for breed –
A dictionary's what you need.

And if you think I long
For you –
You want in self-perception, too!

(Meaning 2-18-2022): This poem seems to be about my view of domineering men in a relationship. Controlling men. Misogynistic men. God fearing and God loving men who think women need to keep to their God given place. Where do they all come from? These men. How did they develop such narrow mindedness? This also seems to be one of my poems that likes to play with words. Again, I did not construct it. That is, sit down and outline it, draw it out schematically. It popped and flowed, word for word, out of my head, like a breath.

How silly is flesh

How silly is flesh
Yet flesh I be
(before I make eternity).
I'm bound to flesh
That's bound to me
I wonder why I'm bound to be.

(Meaning 2-18-2022): Seems quite self-explanatory. Quite literal. Perhaps quite Buddhist. I believe that when these poems came to me, back in my youth forty years ago, some past life voice, some looming spirit of humanity, was speaking to me, filling my head. Why? Because so many of these poems predict my life's outcome; they tell me my philosophy before I even became fully aware of it. Of who I really am without all the constructs of the human world. I spent at least fifteen years, probably more, in a drug induced stupor, like a delusional person.

That period of my life is long over. But the poems I wrote before I fell into such delusion are of the clarity of mind, the Buddhist mind, that I now possess. How else can I explain this other than a past life omniscient spirit spoke to me? Why did these exquisite verses, these pithy statements, pop into my head fully composed? It's an interesting interpretation. But it could just be that I was able to tap into the collective consciousness of all humanity of all time and that the environment of Asia influenced me.

Fools, You cannot join me

Fools
You cannot join me
By a thrash upon the flesh
If you had the wit you'd
Notice
Your timing's in a mesh.
And if I had the wit I'd realize,
It's not me
You wish to join.

(Meaning 2-18-2022): This poem is about what a woman has to say to lustful misogynistic men. They really don't care about her intelligence. She is but a vessel, a servant put on Earth, by their god, for their resource and pleasure. It's pitiful but true.

Stubborn Heart

God Bless this little
Stubborn heart –
(because she won't bless me).
Please take her for a carriage ride,
and keep her company.

Who froze this little heart?
And locked her in the storage vault,
Where ancient treasures lie,
Waiting to be had.

Don't scald a thawing heart,
It never will survive
Allow it time to have

Fresh air,
To melt the ice away
(and the frozen heart won't die).

(Meaning 2-18-2022): Originally, this was two poems I wrote in TL but they seemed to fit together so I just combined them into one. In TL, because of the indirect culture and the four witches disliking me because I impinged upon their status, I suffered quite a lot of depression. In fact, it is why the missionaries who lived in the community of Pattani easily swayed me into having a savior to redeem my sorrows. I fell into their beliefs and remained religious for a few years after I left TL. But then I liked Buddhism better, and stayed a Buddhist until well into my relationship with my second husband. I became religious and accommodated his beliefs for a while but in the end I realized that I just don't believe in the patriarchy coming from the spouse and his god. Buddhism perfectly fits my mind and my way of thinking.

Anyway, back to culture shock TL. This is probably one of my depressive poems, written when I was in a forlorn mood. "Because she won't bless me" seems to mean I can't get my emotions straight with my mind. Are they one in the same? Don't know. "Carriage ride" comes from my connection to Emily Dickenson. I sometimes believe she is one of my past lives. That's just an attractive theory, if nothing else, and I don't get carried away with it! "Storage vault where ancient treasures lie waiting to be had" is a very interesting line. I imagine that deep in the mind and heart lie all the wonders of our past lives or the treasures of knowledge and wisdom from the universal spirit of all humanity. What else could this line mean? And by tapping into this wisdom, we can escape from depression, from the frozen heart, the sad emotions.

The last stanza speaks for itself. Perhaps, my deepest wisdom is telling me that you cannot attain the treasures of wisdom through shock treatments, through drugs, through abrupt slaps across the face. It takes time and pacing to absorb what is real about the self. It takes time

to dig oneself out from under all the crap the world has piled on top of us, and all the delusion the mind has developed because of one's own self-inflicted misguided perceptions.

Hidden Tears

How deeply falls a hidden tear
When heedless voices cry.
Left amid all that we hear,
How aimlessly we try.

If waters only could flow free
Out from the wells dug deep,
Alas, but then we just might be,
Unbound by what we keep.

(Meaning 2-18-2022): This is another of my depressive, culture shock poems revealing how I felt during my most dire moments. Hopeless. Put upon. "Wells dug deep" I would say are the rabbit holes we fall into by our own mental anguish. "Waters flow free" means if we could just let it go, stop being in anguish, then we'd become burden free.

I am a fly

I am a fly.
That is it, that is it, all it,
Just a fly here and now,
Only just a fly, right now.

Although,
There are pheromones
(which other flies understand –
as well as I).
But basically, there is only –
"am now,"
buzz until no buzz.

Maggots don't think
About how disgusting they are
To you and me (people, obviously).
They are just in the
Here and now –
Moving to devour.
Only pheromones

Chase them away.
(Sometimes, I feel like a maggot.)

(Meaning 2-18-2022): Interesting depressive poem with a Buddhist flavor. Very “here and now” and perhaps I was trying not to dwell on past haunts or future hopes and dreams. Pheromones are probably instincts, the nature of being. I’m guessing. “Only pheromones chase maggots away.” What the hell does this mean? We are in the here and now until instincts kick in and we move on? Do pheromones cause a maggot to transform into a fly? Both are disgusting creatures. “Sometimes I feel like a maggot” how depressive yet insightful. Perhaps it’s a good thing to think this way: in the here and now, moving to devour, not aware of what others think about you. (This is enough reflection on my poems for now. It’s nearly five-thirty AM and time for qi gong.)

Gray Tuesday Wont to find

Gray Tuesday
Brought around
In my morning mind
Irritations
Wont to find.

Scathe away
Shapes are round,
Rough
Like beings
That I’ve found.

Gray Tuesday
Brings for me
Another insecurity.

(Meaning 2-18-2022): This and the following poem pertain to my association trait called synesthesia. I see the days of week in shapes and colors. I remember back in first or second grade, some researcher came to our class and asked if anyone saw shapes and colors for weeks,

months, numbers. I did and the person took me aside and interviewed me, but I can't say what became of that. I still see my week and days in this way.

Synesthesia

How is your week
Brown noun?
Pink Sunday is a matted round.
Monday is the same, but lighter
By fate of name.
And Tuesday is pencil led gray,
Shapelessly rough, I dare say.
Wednesday, of which I have always liked,
Is a smooth crimson circle, all right!
Thursday is darker than Tuesday
but shapeless and favorable more.
And Friday is a darker round,
Than its day before.
Saturday is vivid, soft, round, and black
Like the ink of this poem's birth, as a matter of fact.
Pink again, the next Sunday of mine,
My week has been like this
For a very long time.

Writing Poetry

I don't believe anyone
Can be a poet, by profession.
People are merely people,
And some can write poetry
For other people.

Poetry comes to mind
As images and symbols in words
Deeply intertwined
And not immediately apparent:
Shallow consciousness,
Revealing significance.

(Meaning 2-16-2022): I probably wrote my first poem, a witticism, when I was between eight and ten. "Why are lambs as white as snow? What makes children run and go? Why are flowers bright and gay? Why oh why are things this way?" When in the Army I wrote perhaps

five poems. But my poetic mind really blossomed when I ventured to Asia in 1982 to attend a Bengal wedding and teach English in China. As I drifted about, walked the beaches of Mahabalipuram, the busy streets of Hong Kong, and traveled on the Yangtze River, poems began popping from my mind. They were probably a bit rudimentary at first, then became more sophisticated over the months and years. I've ended up with five collections of poems--from China, Thailand, Night Hawk Way, the Yacht House B&B, and a compilation I call Family Secrets. After running a B&B in Florida and returning to Arizona, I didn't write many poems, didn't have the bursts of a poetic mind mostly because I began taking meds that the VA gave me (up to three different kinds at a time) and I was in a relative stupor for perhaps fifteen years. Although, I did write some rather manic poems in a journal I kept during this time.

My poetic mind seems to have dried up. Nothing poetic pops from my head and hasn't for years. Although, in my novel "The Man from Sacaton" I wrote a few poems from the ancient character's mind. But these poems were mostly constructed, unlike the free-flowing words and images that popped from my head in Asia, at the YH, and on NHW. Now I am focused on finishing my novels and providing meaning to my poetry from my earlier years.

Here's what I have to say about writing poetry: I grew up viewing myself as not very intelligent. I could blame my parents for not being very nurturing, but what's the point of that? Anyway, after I returned home from a stint in the Army, I went straight to college and tried to make something of myself. I began seeing myself as perhaps a bit intelligent after all. At Portland Community College, I took an class in English. The teacher was a handicapped woman, with a limp, and one day she shared a poem she was constructing. It seemed long and laborious. She asked what the class thought and I said something stupid like, "Sounds deep." I think the class laughed at my comment. At Portland State University I took a class on poetry and had

trouble relating to the poems and unfolding all this deep meaning that the professor and other students seemed privy to. I went to the professor, some middle-aged man who seemed to think quite a lot about himself as a poet because when I admitted that I was having trouble understanding the poems, he became quite offended. Said something that conveyed to me, “What’s wrong with you? I don’t know why you don’t get it!” Perhaps from my reaction he realized he was an asshole and he backed off a bit. He even gave me a book to look at that helped explain poetry. I kept that book even if he expected it back.

As I am saying in this poem which I wrote while in Thailand, not everyone can write poetry, true poetry, which I believe is images in words that pop out of the free-flowing creative mind. Poetry is not something constructed, planned out like a diagram, like an engineering schematic. Perhaps this is true art, whether a painting or a poem. It is “images and symbols in words” “deeply intertwined” and not immediately apparent. In fact, forty years later I reflect back on all these poems I wrote and understand their meanings. It’s rather mystical in the sense that the poems apply to my life now as if they were written in my past to foretell my future and let me know about the recurring cycles of life—of experiencing the same things over and over again. If these poems had been “constructed” they’d be the same as “Mary had a little lamb” or “Roses are Red . . .” just cutesy little rhymes and ditties trying to put together pieces of this and that. Almost none of my poems were constructed and labored over. I was just moseying along and wham! The poem came to mind. Although, the setting and times inspired me.

Why am I saying at the end of this poem, “shallow consciousness revealing significance?” Here’s my take: If we try to dig deep into our “subconscious” mind, or deeper levels of consciousness, we end up making “constructions” that aren’t free-flowing. We try too hard to be “artsy” and clever, to be creative. And the creative mind lies at the surface of

consciousness. It's ready to reveal itself without deep reflection and thought. That type of thinking is for scientists, not artists. Maybe for the artist/poet the deep mind and surface mind are somehow fused together and that is why the art/poem manifests itself without belabored thought.

A Poem Upside-Down

I might say,
That is,
For me,
Reading a poem
Is like taking in hemp.
But the real high
Comes
As I write
My own poem
(upside-down.)

I'm Stuck!

I'm stuck,
In this choice I made
Not to be stuck.

It all fell on me,
Full and leafy.
I wasn't crushed.
Instead, I sprouted
And grew roots
Becoming that tree
Stuck
In the same old horizon.

The taller I grew
The thinner the air became
But the broader
My particular view.

(Meaning written in email to Kathi 2-13-22): How the hell did I get stuck in such a relationship? He does try much of the time to be right and thoughtful. That's a good thing. He just has a bad side. "Stuck in the same old horizon" seems to mean the same foibles keep

repeating themselves. “The taller I grew” and “the broader my particular view” seems to mean the older I am the better I understand the scope of my situation.

We stay together because at his worst times, when I’m at my worst and tell him that either I leave or he does, he won’t budge. And I’m too exhausted and handicapped to take drastic measures, although I have booked into a hotel a few times. Then he calms down and I’m all right when he is all right. I don’t expect anything more from him. I don’t expect him to be my intellectual equal or to even understand my reality. I just want him to treat me with kindness and not anger and hate. To stop all his projecting onto me. Then we’ll be fine.

I’ve Been Here Too Long

I’ve been where I’m not;
I’ve wanted to be where I’ve been;
I’ve been where I’ve wanted Not to be--
And now –
I want to be wanted
Where I presently am.

But –
I’ve been here too long...
Must move on –
Must be moving along.

(Meaning 2-22-2022): How I was feeling during culture shock in Thailand, at its worst.

Concerning my class in Pattani

It just hit me:
I’ve swung around
To the other side –
Way around.
And now I’m over loaded
On top of the class.

How can I appreciate
Their time,
Their work,
Their claims of effort?
But – shit, I say,

I grade not
On the curve.

(Meaning 2-22-2022): This poem reminds me of the one I wrote in China “through the classroom looking glass” which is probably more literary. This poem is about evaluating the students. Deciding how to grade them. Seems quite literal. “Over loaded” what does this mean? Burdened by the difficult decision on how to grade them? “On top of the class” in control of my decision, in control of the class. Kind of a baseball imagery. Grading is a baseball game? I’m becoming too analytical. The simplicity of the poem should speak for itself. It shouldn’t be difficult to understand.

Nameless Faces, Shrinking Time

Nameless faces,
Shrinking time,
Endless places,
Once were mine.
Now alone
Along the shore
I pass eternity
Once more.

Who has come
To soothe this pain?
Away from me
Falls silent rain.

(Meaning 2-22-2022): I am using this poem as a heading in my second chapter of my sequel novel “And You Learn How to Live.” The chapter is called “the Eulogy” and starts out leaving the reader to think it’s Lucy Davis’ funeral, after her execution. But governor Ducey grants Lucy a reprieve before the State injects her with lethal drugs, and this funeral eulogy is for Lucy’s aunt Lucinda and is occurring two years after Obama grants Lucy a pardon. This poem is a sad poem in the sense that the speaker’s life is running out “shrinking time” and what she once had or knew are no longer hers. “Along the shore,” seems to reflect the “driftwood” poem in the

novel's first chapter. And "pass eternity" sounds like dying or death; "once more" sounds like the theory of rebirth. Sounds like the speaker is either old or on the execution gurney facing death. She is sad because she wonders who cares "who will come to soothe this pain?" Does anyone care if I die? This is sad and painful for the speaker (the poet). And what's sadder perhaps is that her life fades away silently, with no one with her to care. Is rain silent? No, unless it's a soft fading drizzle. I remember this type of rain in Oregon. The drizzle is constant, cold, gray, unpleasant, and silent. Sounds very depressing especially if this is how we see ourselves at the time of death. No one comes around to say good-bye.

Tumid, Timid, I Dare Say

Tumid, timid,
I dare say,
Tenacity contrives the way.
Useless is a timid cry
Unless it's meant to be a lie.
And careless is a Tumid word,
Unless it's meant to be absurd.

(Comment 2-22-2022): This is one of my word play poems. What more can I say?

Sweet little letter, query sent from me

Sweet little letter –
(Query sent from me)
Please – reach your destination,
Miles across the sea.

And when he starts to read you,
Subtle, try to be –
But force a good decision,
Appropriate to me.

And if he doesn't care to,
(and you fail in your quest) –
then try to look unwanted,
and at your very best.

But if he should agree to,

Affirmation's call,
Pretend you're not a letter,
Of misery at all.

I sent a letter of proposal to the man who became my first husband. Not a close marriage. He never read any of my poems. Not even this one. And he never would play the piano or his clarinet for me. That bothered me. Why not? I had asked him several times. The marriage crumbled after thirteen years and ended in a bitter divorce which I describe in my memoirs "The Desert's Edge" and "Law School High."

Sweet precocious little nervousness

Sweet precocious little nervousness,
Come closer,
Whisper to me aloud.
Your eyes are bright
Beams of charm –
Two veritable stars
From inner space.

I love you,
Precious little nervousness.
Your grin's a
Blessed wake.
Come close to me
And whisper,
I'll give, whatever
You can take.

I remember this being about a shy boy student (who copied the back cover of a book for his book report, word for word.) There was no sexual feeling from me for this kid. I don't even remember my liking him that much especially after he plagiarized like an idiot.

Temptation, tasting what is mine

You,
A flower in my heart
You be.
Oh, Temptation,
Fruit of the divine,

Clinging to the branches,
Tasting what is mine.
Longing,
Pulling,
Oh, Temptation,
Tasting what is mine.

Written in Burma, 1984. After I finished teaching in Pattani, I traveled in Burma for a week or two, whatever was allowed at that time and before Burma became Myanmar. Missionary friends of mine arranged for me to travel with another young woman; don't remember much about her. But the thing is, as soon as we arrived in Rangoon, she didn't want to travel with me. She wanted to stay in Rangoon and study Burmese. She was kind of a prudish Christian, I think. As soon as I arrived in the airport, I sold some liquor I had brought with me on the black market. Perhaps she caught sight of this and was disturbed. I did this because a young traveler I met in Pattani suggested that I sell liquor in Burma, and he was right. Touts hovered around the airport gates expecting foreign tourists to sell them contraband. Don't remember how or why this poem came into my head. Maybe it had something to do with that prudish Christian lady.



This is a painting I made of the impending monsoon at sea. It's hanging in my Pattani flat where my British colleague and his wife who is holding Doi the Siamese cat, are sitting. I lost this painting somewhere along the way of life. At its bottom I penned-in the Longfellow stanza "The little waves with their soft white hands efface the footprints of the sand."

Impending Monsoon

Ah, cumulonimbus, do tell,
What comes is imminent.
Creeping gages cross the land,
Embedding shadows:
Stretching, diffusing –
Grains fallen into photons.

Sleepless anopheles begin to dance
And hover, inside.
What comes is immanent.
Mynahs shout across the pond.
Synchronized –
They swoop over the land.

And, who is he?
Careless about the imminent.
Changing not in his direction.
He will take you in his arms,
Under his body,
Blurring your vision.
He will miss your charm,
Your warmth,
For he cannot miss his eminence.

Ah, cumulonimbus, so well,
Shows us what is imminent.

(Meaning 2-22-2022): This poem sounds somewhat contrived. Maybe it's self-explanatory. Maybe it's too deep which makes it feel constructed. The Thailand monsoons came abruptly, usually from the sea, and they were exciting, almost mystical. I remember being stranded under a shop awning while sheets of rain streamed down in front of me, from the roof; on another occasion sheltering in a bungalow on Lamsom Island when I was with Nutta Wut, a Thai man with whom I was investing in beach bungalows on his island. When sheltering during the bursting downpour and winds, the sound was mystifying, like a god making his presence known. I'll take this poem as mostly a literal description of the monsoon. But I do wonder "who

is he?" and why is he careless about the imminent, the ominous storm that's approaching? Why doesn't he get out of the way? Who is he taking in his arms, under his body?

I believe He is the god-like monsoon consuming me with his presence. Not caring about who I am. "He will miss your charm" because of his overwhelming god-like "eminence." A god may seem "careless," haphazard, and unchanging. Like the monsoon.

This sounds a bit over analytical. Maybe the poem is just that. Maybe not. The Thai monsoon was a powerful, overwhelming force of nature that trapped everyone in his place.

Umbrella, umbrella, When will the rain stop?



Umbrella, umbrella
When will the rain stop?
Drip drip drip
Plop plop plop plop.
Splash!
You wet net
And underneath I am a sponge,
Mildewed dewy
Done done done.

(Comment 2-22-2022): Another monsoon poem. Self-explanatory. I had written this poem in calligraphy and hung it on the wall of my flat in Pattani, along with some of my village paintings. During a visit from my PDX colleague, an older man named Jathar (I talk about him when describing my Ko Samui poem "it's the horizon I like"), he came to my flat and saw this poem and asked if one of students wrote it because I has spelled sponge "spong." How embarrassing. But I've never been good at spelling. Such detail is not my forte. No worries. I'm a poet, an artist, and novelist with insights. But it's a funny story.

We are like driftwood

We –
We are like driftwood
Brought to shore
By the sea, resting
A while
Until the next tide.

Some go.
Some stay.
Some new ones come.
We (must go away),
Must drift alone
Upon the sea,
And end up where
We ought to be.

(Meaning 2-19-2022): When writing the sequel to the Lucy Davis story “And You Learn How to Live” I inserted some of my short poems that seemed to fit very well into the overall meaning of the story. This is the first poem in the first chapter about Lucy on the gurney about to be executed for her crimes. Seems to be a philosophical poem, perhaps Buddhist in sentiment. I compare life to driftwood. To people are coming and going, staying in one place perhaps. “We must go away” means we all must die. “Where we ought to be” could be heaven, Pure Land, hell, reincarnation, rebirth? In Buddhist philosophy this fits very well into the idea of karma, you’ll end up in a designated place according to your karma, how good or badly you behaved in this life. “Must drift alone upon the sea” the sea is the platform of life, where we take the raft of dharma, or whatever philosophy/religion, and aim for the shore of enlightenment or heaven. But we are alone in this endeavor. No one else helms the raft although people influence, persuade, cajole, and torture and abuse. Maybe some abusers even control the victim’s mind and some influencers control the minds of their followers. But in the end, no one is going to merge in the “soul” or mind or essence of the person when he or she dies. Death happens singularly just as birth does.

Spend your gift of life preparing for where you “ought” to be, or hope to be, such as in the Pure Land. How? It’s all spelled out in many forms. Do right, be kind, considerate, compassionate, make meritorious acts, behave with dignity and not with hatred, anger, greed, and foremost, don’t live under the cloud of delusion. Dig yourself out from under it no matter how badly you’ve been traumatized in life. “Must go away” perhaps means leave the past trauma behind and always aim to be good, right, and meritorious. I love this poem from the heart.



Waning Phase

My love is going in waning phase,
(as for time – there’s only being)
Albedo falls from passing waves . . .
New moonlight tis all in seeing.

Distant shadows cast to me
Old vessels and their voices,
By midnight on the open sea
I’ve grown weary of the choices.

This ship I helm won’t set ashore,
At lengths, I do require
And if I find your love no more,
Then the moon I shall desire.

(Meaning 2-17-2022): This is one of my astronomy poems as well as a love poem and it seems related to the above “driftwood poem.” “Albedo falls from passing waves” is the reflective powers of the moon or the sunlight. Reflection is thought. Passing waves are probably passing tumults. Reflections on past or passing difficulties. “New moonlight is all in seeing” means to move on to the new and forget old difficulties. It’s all possible with what we allow the

mind to “see” or think. “Distant shadows cast to me” is again reflections of the past. Midnight is kind of the “turning” point of time, probably from old past to new possibilities. “Open sea” the vast expanse of existence, of the mind, of the sea the Buddha’s dharma raft carries us over to the shores of enlightenment. “Weary of the choices” tired of repeating stupid habits. “Ship I helm” is my own being, my mind; “won’t set ashore” means I need more time to get my head right, or that I won’t jump back into old habits without spending time in reflection to get my mind clear and pure. If when I obtain this clarity of mind, and you’re not with me, or you can’t love the rejuvenated and right thinking me, then the moon I shall desire. I just like the sound of this last phrase. If you can’t love who I am, then my desire, or my pursuit, will simply be “life” the “moon” in all its phases, reflections, and beauty.

I want to explain some of my Buddhist or spiritual background inspiring these poems. When I returned home from the Army back in 1976, I was determined to make something of myself. My military experience had been difficult and I viewed the Army as a spring board. I was going to leap high and become something. I headed straight to college with big dreams, at times I even considered medical school, but I’m not that smart. Anthropology appealed to me. I had always been interested in foreign lands and cultures, ancient and modern. I was truly on my own, possessing my own motivations and without a mentor or parent to guide me. But I was filled with a positive spirit about myself and forged ahead. I was greatly interested in many things. My mind was a sponge. And the radio, perhaps PBS, was playing lectures by Alan Watts which I listened to religiously and taped. I digested much of what Alan Watts had to say and appreciated his philosophical viewpoint. After I earned my MA in English, I headed to Asia all pumped up and ready to experience other cultures. In China I was immersed in the spirit of poetry. Especially when I cruised on the Yangtze River. Perhaps Alan Watts is the spark of

inspiration for the Buddhist or Asian leanings of my poems. I read many of his books and in college I took courses on Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism. So, I wasn't without a spiritual backing when these poems emerged from my mind while I drifted like driftwood throughout Asia.



The Mosque in Pattani

Into the evening sun
We journeyed
To an Island of the sea.
Then we returned – beyond the day:
Indian Ink changed the blue of Siam Bay.

Now god and man
Create a tapestry
Along this darkened canal:
Gentle waves
And lights from town
Reach across,
Long and down.

There is no moon tonight 'til 3,
A waning crescent memory
(this town is Pattani).

We all saw the Mosque
Upon the bank
Whose simple light
Illuminated our Path.
The women inside,
Clad in white abayas (shawls)
Looked like haunting spirits
As they worshiped their god.

(Comments 2-19-2022): I took the evening boat trip that the town offered and this poem describes my experience, exactly. Including the mosque and worshipping women along the channel's shore.



Mysteries of the Ocean

The mysteries of the Ocean
Are like journeys through the day
Compacted by a multitude
Of visions on the way.

Gulls in Lofty Air

There's something about the sound
Of gulls
In lofty, winter air
That makes me feel
Free and alive.

Enjoying the seascape, nothing else

There's nothing like the sea
Expanding out in front of me
While evening rays of liquid gold
Catch the splashing surf unfold
And westward winds blow soothing air
Around my breasts, through my hair.
And I upon these porcelain sands
Eat yellow mangoes from the land.

Mango, Sweet Mango

Mango, sweet mango what's mine,

Your taste is more than divine.
And if I could – I know I would
Savor you all of the time.

I got a letter today
From a man who lives far away
But he couldn't be what I wanted to see,
He knew not of the words I must say.

I lingered a stretch for a walk,
Lost in crowds where only I'd talk,
I was wondering why, no more could I cry
When reception receded to mock.

He knows I'm not asking for much,
A complacent friend I can touch,
But time took away the light of his day
And now he's grown weary to clutch.

The market's progressive in sight
With fruits of heaven's delight,
And I had to buy a mango to try,
Sensations to end the day right.

I'll write a letter to him--
The truth is not just a whim;
Don't go away afraid of my day,
I am not the companion of prim.

The mango is pitted un-round;
It's flat and unusual, I found,
But if ripe you can feel, it's carnal to peel,
Sweet nectar that won't let me down.

(Comment: This is a poem about Francois. I got a letter from him, took a walk, an bought a mango to try.)

These eyes grow old and weary

These eyes grow old and weary--
Yet on they wear each day --
With everything that guides them,
With all that comes their way.

These eyes of mine are growing old --
I may even watch them die.

But seeing's all I'll let them do,
For I'll never let them cry.

(Comments 2-19-2022): A depressive poem? But a poem of determination not to give up?



Martha, me, and two students before the Pattani marsh

Martha Marino was a 50-year-old Peace Corps worker who became my friend in Pattani. She was extremely gregarious, active, and intelligent. She wanted to do something with me every weekend. Before she arrived, I had become used to a secluded quiet life and had in fact been suffering from culture shock. At first, she was a welcome presence, a true friend, but then I found her a bit overwhelming. We had a kind of falling out when a male teacher friend of mine, Jathar, a colleague from PSU PDX came for a visit. In a casual letter I had invited him to stop by because he was traveling in the area. He expected a sexual relationship with me and I had no interest. Jathar was a Dutch man about the same age as Martha. Well, Martha was a lot more sexually adventuresome than I ever was and I tried to pawn Jathar off on her. But she wasn't interested and I probably became perturbed and tension developed between Martha and me. After that, we never got our friendship back on track. She even told me that I needed professional help and she was probably right. I did have a few psychological issues packed away in my psyche which were bound to come out one day. Anyway, about ten years later, while I was living on Night Hawk Way, I receive a very friendly letter from Martha. She had taught in China

and was teaching Spanish and French at a HS in Laguna Beach where she lived and had grown up. She had two sons and after a few letters, she asked me if my engineer spouse could help her son land a job at Intel. When my first spouse and I went to Asia in '95 for a three-month tour, we stopped at Martha's house in Laguna Beach—a fabulous house in a primo location that she had inherited. Martha was a marvelous host and a great friend once again. During this visit she did mention our falling out. “It had to do with that guy,” she suggested, meaning Jathar. Eventually, as the years passed and I tumbled into my own obscurity, we lost touch. Last year I looked her up online and saw that she had passed away at age 91 leaving behind an incredible legacy of adventure, travel, and wisdom. I guess, in a way, she had been a kind of mentor to me, and that is something I've rarely had in life.



I wrote the following poem during one of my weekend trips in Thailand with Martha. We traveled to the beautiful island of Ko Samui. I'm using this poem at the end of my novel “And You Learn How to Live” to express my vision of the Buddhist Pure Land.

It's the Horizon I Like

Like the quiet,
The human
Falls against my ears.

The murmurs of the ferry stretch

Across the sea.
Approaching island
Quietude—

The evening moon-sun has
Scattered stones
With little homes.

It's the horizon I like.

(Meaning 2-20-2022): "Like the quiet, the human falls against my ears" signifies deep reflection about my nature. I am on the sea of life that Buddha talks about. On that raft (ferry) traveling to the shore (island) of enlightenment or in this case possibly to the Pure Land, a much better place than the defiled world we are born into. I see the Pure Land in sight; I'm approaching it. Quietude is calmness, peace, and what we want to achieve in our practice of dharma, in our efforts and struggles to exist. "The evening sun-moon." In the Pure Land, the buddhas or bodhisattvas are the sun and moon, perhaps the most splendid and beautiful thing in our sight away from the defiled world. They are orbs of brilliant, subtle, reflective light. "Scattered stones with little homes." Interesting. The brilliant orbs, the buddhas and bodhisattvas have spread the dharma? The stones? Where people, practitioners, followers of the calm, quiet philosophy of Buddhism, make their homes. "It's the horizon I like." Obviously, it's what I see ahead of me as I travel across the sea to the shores of a better place. I hope for a better place, for a promising outcome to all my struggles. Hope, despite difficulties and struggles, seems to be a predominant theme in my poetry. I've been more hopeful in life than a person who falls into dark depression. I don't get depressed any more. But I had low points in life when I suffered from culture shock or difficulties from trauma.

Recently I watched a Prime Video called "Two Minds" about so called bipolar people and how they're suicidal. I can't help but think they need to get a grip and not just accept this

label and allow themselves to succumb to the diagnosis. In a way, it seems I have adapted the philosophy of my indifferent pioneer stalk parents. I think when I was a child, my mother saw me as misbehaving, acting up, and in need of straightening out with severe punishments. She didn't like that she had a troubling child (not a troubled one). I don't know. Maybe she's always been right but it's taken me a lifetime to achieve clarity of mind—to understand myself and realize that nothing is or ever has been wrong with me.

These days, my hope is not to rectify my past. To have a reconciliation with my childhood family, to find a bond of love with them. No, it's to look ahead at the horizon. To look for wisdom, peace, quietude of mind in the Pure Land island of Ko Samui. I leave the past behind. And make my home in the stones of dharma and the brilliant light of those who are wiser than myself or my parents or most people. Perhaps Martha has found her way to the Pure Land. She was wise and it's where she belongs.

One last word on "it's the horizon I like." Look ahead, be hopeful for a brighter, wiser, and calmer future. Don't dwell on the painful past, or even a painful present. And don't fall into deep dark depression. Don't hide in your room for days contemplating suicide. Buck up! Think about yourself in a positive light. It's not selfish and wrong to do so, despite what the world may have told you. Everyone has a buddha nature which means they possess the nature of becoming wise.



I want to be the sea, in reality (Written while on Ko Samui with Martha Marino)

I want to be
Close to you.
God?
Are you me?
Are you the sea
I see in front of me?
Or is it we?

I want to be close to us--
To flow down the channel
Free and wee!
I want to get close
To the sea.

No,
I want to be the sea,
In reality.

(Meaning 2-20-2022): This is a poem I wrote about contemplating the divinity of my nature. Was I struggling with the Christian concept of a creator God, one that was of my childhood heritage? Martha was a bit wiser and her philosophy entailed a fuller, rounder view of spirituality. She was quite a contrast to the missionaries who were my only friends before she arrived in Pattani. In the poem I'm asking who are you god? And am I my own divinity? Am I merged with my Creator? Or am I the sea, the vast expanse of life I behold on the beautiful setting of Ko Samui. Then the poem talks about what I want. "Close to us" perhaps means I want to feel this divinity more strongly. I want to have "fun" with it, to "flow down the channel" of living "free and wee." I want to get close to the sea probably means I want to feel, understand, and know as much about my existence as possible. Not so much that I want to know "god" and be his devoted worshiper. I want to free myself from that constraint of my religious heritage because that heritage doesn't mesh with my mind, with my own thoughts about my reality. I want to be the sea, I want to be my life, not a created being.

But in truth, despite this poem, I went on viewing myself as religious while in TL and for the first few years of my first marriage. Why? When obviously my deepest level of consciousness (my poetry) expresses otherwise. Because religious adherences is a surface reliance. It's a philosophy to cling to, to make oneself feel better about the self. To say, oh, yeah, I have a righteous existence. My behavior is correct. People believe that to be good and right you must follow a god, believe in a savior. And the missionaries convinced me that my salvation was in faith in their religious philosophy. I became vulnerable in TL because I was alone facing severe culture shock and teachers who became my adversaries because of jealousy. I now fully embrace these little Buddhist poems I wrote forty years ago. I fully understand them on a surface conscious level. I have no daddy god, and I really don't believe that I have this redeemable soul. I'm just a living human being who wants to fully understand the true nature of reality (the sea of life) and aspires for a calm, wise, and clear-thinking mind. A mind uncluttered by delusions, by all the dogmas, constraints, and convictions of humanity. Clarity of mind, wisdom about reality, is truly what I desire to possess when I leave this existence. What actually lies ahead? Don't know. Only hope it's a better place where, if I do continue to exist, I can continue to unfold the wisdoms of my nature. That would be, hypothetically, the Pure Land of existence.



A New Road

Where am I now?

I've ventured far
On a new road
Yet,
I've been here before.
A deja-vu,
Or is it true –
Have I been here before?

As silence shakes,
A trumpet blows,
I know not where
I'm bound to go
But words I hold
Dear to me
Travel back eternally.

I went to Singapore from Pattani looking for a teaching job. I remember walking around Singapore as contentedly as I had been when walking around HK. Poetry popped in my head in both cities. HK and S'pore were my favorite cities in Asia.

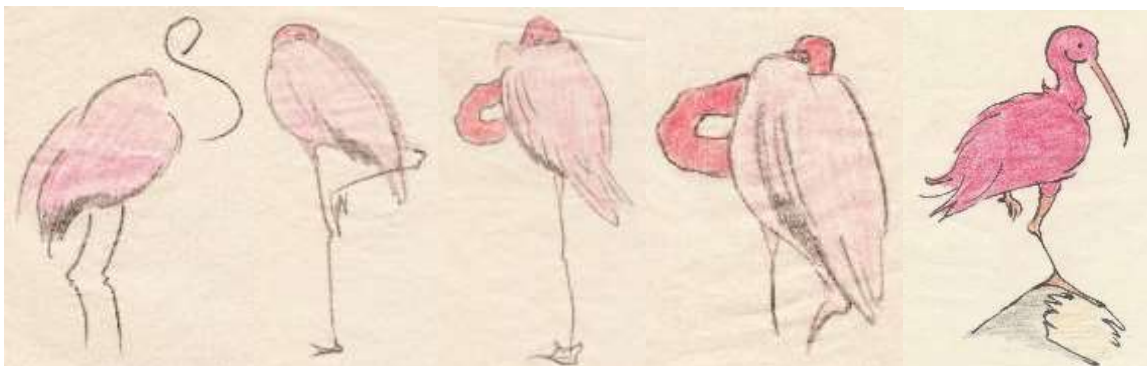
(Meaning 2-20-2022): This poem seems obvious to me. I use it in my novel "Key to 1000 Doors" as a heading for one of Gopan Subba's chapters. In the poem, as I walked around S'pore, I asked, where am I now? Perhaps literally and literarily. I had probably been walking for hours around the city which is something I tended to do. Perhaps I came on a street called "New Road" such as the one in Kathmandu. I probably really experienced deja-vu, something we all do from time to time. Then I ask if I really was here before, which of course I wasn't because this was my first trip to S'pore. Unless, I had literally gone in circles and came back to the same road I had been trouncing upon earlier in the day. A possibility. It did happen. So, both literally and metaphorically I ask, have I been here before? Earlier today or in a past life.

The second stanza is deeper and more literary. "Silence shakes." Like quietude, silence seems to mean I reach a deeper level of consciousness, of self-understanding. "A trumpet blows" means I awaken to awareness. The trumpet goes off in my head. Alarm bells ring. Then I say, "I

know not where I'm bound to go." This doesn't mean my deeper level is naive. Nobody, no matter how wise, religious, or clairvoyant, knows their fate. As human beings we can speculate, contemplate, or accept by faith where we'll end up, but we really don't know. "Words I hold dear to me." Perhaps this is my wisdom which is eternal, has always been in place since the beginning of time or before that if there is no beginning. The wisdom is "We don't know our fate. We don't know where we're bound to end up." Like it or not. It's reality. And my wisest mind tells me this has never been any different. I have never in my life experienced any hocus pocus magic or supernatural powers to proclaim otherwise. The only powers and magic I've ever experienced come from the essence of my own mind. I can see how I might attribute this marvelous mind of existence as being mystical, because of the foretelling of my poetry, for one thing, because of the coincidental things that have happened in my life, the moments of clear thinking and of seeing rather mysterious connections that seem mystical. But my reality any determination of our fates is mere speculation just as it always has been.

The Shanty Town (written while in Singapore)

They're tearing down
A shanty town
Along Rocher Canal.
I am alone to wander now
In front, behind,
Besides,
I am just a weary traveler
Alone along inside.



Bird Park

Oh, why not come
To sit and watch
To hear the gentle sound
Of birds and cool water falls
Spreading mist around.

Instead, they come in
Flocks called mobs
To take a snap of
“this is me at Bird Park”
(and then they quickly flee).



(Comment 2-22-2022): I wrote this poem while I was in Singapore applying for work at the National University. I was put on a short list but never got a job offer so I returned to PDX then got a job at Kuwait University. This poem reminds me of one I wrote while in China “By the moon gate” where everyone was taking pictures of themselves as I sat alone.

