

*Listening to the Song of Coal and Metal:*  
*Poems at Dan's Cabin 2012*

*By Francis E. Kazemek*

## Arrival

Stepping out  
At 4 A.M.  
Rain's quit  
Clouds uncover  
The starry floor  
Wind ruffles the leaves  
Sprinkling me as I pee

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The hemlocks I see in the morning  
Hold blue in their high branches  
And quiet below at their base  
They understand that heaven  
Is rooted in the commonplace

## Morning Song

Morning and I've got a fire  
Going in the wood burning stove  
It's taking the chill off the cabin  
So I've pulled the rocker in front  
With a cup of coffee and slice  
Of my wife's rye bread spread with butter  
And with the damper half-open  
I listen to the flames dancing  
And crackling on the flesh of dead trees

With eyes closed I hear a different  
Music coming from Grandpa's coal  
Stove and see myself as a child  
In front of it after serving  
Early morning Mass with a cup  
Of coffee and slice of rye bread  
Layered with Grandpa's cold butter—  
My second Communion of the day—  
Bathing in the warmth with eyes closed  
Listening to the song of coal and metal

### At the Kitchen Table

*Our loved ones inhabit us even more  
when they are dead.*

*--Jean Sullivan*

When I saw my mother the other day  
She had grown young again smiling  
And pretty as she looked in her wedding picture  
She was baking bread and I couldn't wait  
For a thick warm slice with melting butter  
My father walked into the kitchen full of his prime  
The smell of coal smoke from a railroad engine  
Still on him and the left knee of his dungarees  
Torn from a boxcar swung into too carelessly  
He stole a hug and a kiss while her strong hands  
Were busy kneading on the breadboard  
I sat at the table drinking coffee with half-and-half  
And laughed telling them how young they looked  
My father grinned and winked at me  
While my mother reached across with her floured hand  
And touched my forehead with two fingers

## Wastrel

I dreamed of an Irish wastrel  
Poet scholar husband drunk  
Locked out of their second story flat  
By his wife who shouts "No more!"  
He wanders around town cadging drinks  
In a long gray canvas raincoat  
Asking to be let in but no one wants him  
He stands outside his home watching  
A grandchild carry in a mechanical wooden  
Toy of a man riding a bicycle up and down  
Up and down it was his as a child  
And he cries out "Don't harm it!"  
But the child and his wife at the window  
Ignore him as the dream fades with morning

## Visitation

Six women stop outside my cabin door  
Dressed for the weather in rain slickers  
Floppy canvas hats all carrying sticks  
Not the commercial kind but wooden ones  
Carefully carved by them or someone else  
They're on their annual trip to the woods

The women are in their mid-sixties  
Or early-seventies and tell me  
How they'd like to write their stories for future  
Generations and I urge them to do so

The tallest one asks if I could write  
A poem from a single word she gave me  
I tell her sure but it might take some time  
We laugh and I say a little poem  
By Emily Dickinson to send them  
Six joyful old friends down the path in the rain

### Haiku at Dan's Cabin

No bird song  
But the music of rain  
Dropping from the leaves  
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The Superior surf rising  
To break white  
On the shore  
Inland it haunts me  
\*\*

The fern covered  
Forest floor still  
Waiting for dark  
\*\*

Only the water  
Falling over rocks  
Fills the forest  
\*\*

A red maple leaf  
Stopped me on the path  
To watch another fall  
\*\*

A slender aspen  
Bending in the breeze  
But its leaves won't hold

At Lake of the Clouds

High on the escarpment  
Looking down on Lake of the Clouds  
Dark sky cold rain  
Moving across from Superior  
An old man in a wheelchair  
Pushed up the winding  
Wooden rampway by his  
Tall angular wife  
Stares out over the endless green  
Turning yellow and russet  
Clasps his wife's hand and exclaims  
"Ain't it something, Honey!"

Walt

His dad worked the CCCs  
And fell in love with the country,  
So when he got back home  
To Wisconsin he packed up the family  
In '35 and moved to Ontonagon.

"I was raised here," Walt said  
Over his hot beef and mashed potatoes.  
"Too much food but I'm a bachelor now  
After my wife passed and eat only  
Out in restaurants where I stock up.  
I don't like eating alone at home."

A thin man in his eighties, neatly dressed  
In work pants and checkered shirt,  
Bright eyes and open to conversation.

Two men were talking with the waitress  
About baiting bears and she said  
That they used donuts to bring them to killing.

I asked Walt about bear hunting and he said,  
"Yes, I think they're doing that now.  
I don't keep track of those things anymore."  
Uninvited, he offered, "I shot my first deer  
At twenty, the only animal I killed in my life."

He was still eating alone as I said goodbye,  
And the trio was still talking about bears.  
Walking to my car I carried an unaccountable sadness.

## Autumn

The world is turning around me  
Popple leaves drifting to the ground  
Thistle and milkweed seeds taking flight  
Maples finally revealing their proletariat leanings  
Pink red russet scarlet leaves  
Oak trees tired of it all longing for sleep  
Shedding all that isn't necessary  
Acorns litter the ground  
Ancient hemlocks have seen it all  
Looking down from their lofty heights  
Laughing as the wind ruffles through their branches  
They remember too when they were young  
And so full of expectations

**Wake Up**

Walking under a gathering  
Of old hemlocks  
They begin to drop  
Their green cones on me  
Two bouncing off my head  
They seem to be shouting  
Wake up! Look up!  
See us now!

## Manido Falls

The Ojibwa people called it “ghost,”  
Or “spirit” in their native language.  
Nowadays it beckons a host  
Of hikers and people of all age

Whose brief photographs try to hold  
The river leaping over stone:  
The human urge to stop and mold  
All natural forces not their own.

The copper miners scoured the land;  
Loggers came and cleared the forest.  
Their names and dreams now lie in sand  
Where at its mouth the river rests.

Water falling over shalely bed,  
Your singing spirit ignores the dead!

### Lily Pond

A beaver dam at Lily Pond  
Built tight woven with branches  
And gnawed limbs of tender popple  
Holds water for a home reaches  
Far beyond its narrow span  
Welcoming lilies that bloom  
In summer and the webby-feet  
Of geese and ducks that leave too soon  
A beaver dam is a selfish  
And selfless thing that browsing deer  
Enjoy along the marshy shore  
And where dragonflies shimmer in the mere

### **Mirror Lake**

Mirror Lake in the chill fall air holding  
Sugar maple and aspen leaves going  
Away in their array of beet-blood reds  
Pale rose shocking yellows that turn heads

Stare into it and it will hold you too  
Your watery reflection rising anew  
Then rippling across to the other shore  
Like leaves drifting away for evermore

**Union Spring**

It doesn't stop  
Bubbling like a fumerole  
From an active volcano  
It spreads rings of sand  
Across the spring bottom  
It only knows how to give  
Not receive

### No Sadness

A strong wind blowing  
Steadily bursting into gusts  
Of forty miles an hour or more  
All is sere and fading  
Greens turning into yellows  
Umber pale reds leaves  
Departing from trees

I come upon the last flowers  
Of summer on Escarpment Trail  
Low holding tight to the ground  
Shielded against the wind  
They too are dying soon to be gone  
But I smile knowing like the rest  
Of their forest fellows they'll  
Be back again to bloom in spring

### Hunting Agates

At the river mouth as it flows  
Into Lake Superior I hunted  
With eight other people for agates  
They knew what they were looking for  
But I didn't so I picked up stones  
Of all colors and shapes that caught my eye  
White speckled eggs smooth skipping stone shale  
A chunk of red rhyolite born deep  
In the belly of a volcano  
Pebbles of quartz that must have been here  
At the beginning of the planet  
I threw them all back into the lake  
Except for two I kept for no reason  
Other than they felt good in my hand  
And they had picked me out from countless others

### End of Summer

Lavender asters at the end of summer  
Mark the paths and open places in the woods  
Brightening the dark green floor with a glimmer  
Of what will fade and come again as they should

So long as humans protect the wild places  
With a reverence for what they have not made  
And do not turn all into cash oases  
Of clear-cut trees strip-mined hills and trucking grades

The black-winged butterfly soon going away  
To death flutters from leaf to leaf on ground  
Alights upon my proffered hand and slowly sways  
Goodbye to the bounty of the world it found

**Stars the Same**

In the small clearing  
Beneath a ring of hemlocks  
A clear star-covered sky  
The same one I saw once  
Above a fire pit in Idaho  
And at a mountain lake in Montana  
Though I've grown old  
Stars glitter a kind of hope  
For something I can't imagine

### Shade

The forest has a somber mien  
Hemlocks large maples evergreens shading  
The floor damp with fallen and decaying  
Branches leaves fern-covered  
When the sun shines it's through slender  
Aspen birches and little hemlock sprites  
But even with their filigree of light  
The cold creek water over its stony bed  
Seems to be chiding—be serious

## Sabbath

Sitting on the swing above the creek  
Rippling over the smooth stone fall  
Into a still pool where it rests  
Before moving down through the forest  
I listen to squirrels chattering  
And the wind whistling through the trees  
Dressed against the morning chill air  
I hold a book of poems by a man  
Who chose the fields and woods to honor  
The Sabbath with his outdoor prayer  
He believed he took a better part  
I too celebrate with a joyous heart

**Early Evening Walk in the Forest**

Sounds  
In the distance  
Lake Superior washing  
Onto the shore  
I imagine the whisper  
Of an aspen leaf  
Falling to the forest floor  
Little Union River rippling  
Tumbling over its shalely bed  
Its music doesn't stop  
My breathing  
That someday will

**Belief**

Sitting in the dark on the deck  
Surrounded by hemlocks maples popples  
All is still but for my breathing  
An owl in the distance calling “Who – who whowho”  
And the murmur of the creek beyond the woodpile  
The full moon rising above the canopy  
Shines a glimmer of silver light  
On the log railing by my right shoulder  
And I find myself wanting to believe

**Warning**

Aspen leaves turning gold  
Maples turning scarlet  
Gather them to hold  
On a desk or closet

Where your books and pages  
Press dried summer flowers  
Leaves crumble like sages  
Cautioning the fading hours

**Last Night at the Cabin**

Smoke from the cabin wood-burning stove  
Hangs beyond in the darkening forest  
The pale blue-gray sky as yet moonless  
And starless hovers over hemlock  
Sugar maple and birch tree tops  
The trickle of the creek weaves the dark  
I used to imagine nights like this  
Now alone one is here and I try  
To hold it close with heart and hope  
Before morning's brightening air

## Partings

*Anticipate every goodbye.  
--Jean Sullivan*

Say goodbye to what you cannot hold  
Days unfold seasons turn to red  
Years bring the loss of those you love  
Friends that once caught your laughter drift away  
Dreams always just beyond the horizon  
You now know you'll never reach at last  
Say goodbye to the books that you treasure  
The poems and stories will still breathe between  
Pages when you no longer read them  
Redwing blackbirds will still be singing  
In reeds along the bay but you won't hear them  
Say goodbye while you are still able  
While a smile catches you by surprise  
A poem catches your heart a bird your joy  
A loved one your blessing as you say  
Goodbye goodbye goodbye goodbye goodbye