

## **Selected Poems (a preliminary collection)**

### **Ann Redpath**

#### **OTTO D.**

"A big man to lose-"  
Boots kept saying.  
Like a vine--  
not a willowy vine--  
but the tenacious kind.  
growing wide  
forever reaching  
sometimes fierce  
always curious--  
Otto D.  
fiercesome vine.

The man sang to his children,  
opened their eyes  
to the world,  
to its wideness,  
made them interact  
with that world,  
made them react to him,  
made them sing.

The man took hold  
as a truck driver,  
teamster, salesman;  
reached out  
from the picket line;  
fought injustice;  
kept on in those 1930s  
despite those who sought  
to cut him back with bigoted labels.  
The man clung  
to every bargain,  
making sure no family member  
escaped-without old bananas,  
tired chickens, and  
pounds of bruised butter.

Not an ordinary vine  
he clung to his beliefs

in the Latin Mass.  
He looked to each new brick  
in life  
as something to conquer,  
or to argue about,  
but never-- no never--  
to just leave alone.

And as a vine encircles,  
drawing back in on itself,  
Otto drew on his family,  
leaving them strongly entwined  
in the wreath of the world.  
"A big man to lose."

#### **August at the Beach (1978)**

Like the sea crab  
that grabs hold,  
hangs on  
and finally  
lets go--  
the beach in August.  
In the grasp  
these refrerections:  
sunset off the deck  
tubing down a dark wave  
vacuuming up flea crackers  
dining on bouillabaisse  
clams casino  
and half and half  
the Garriety run  
with the voice of Himself,  
the constant comings and  
goings of Philadelphia's  
most colorful people--  
    Jeannie with the phantom family  
        (did anyone really see them?)  
    "the reverend" with news from Nicaragua,  
    Elaine playing "up, up and away,"  
    Judy, gourmet counselor who hates cooking,  
    Bob with hat on doing a running commentary  
        on Himself's Irish songs,  
    Allie, a most dignified clam shell sucker;

Mimi, stopping only long enough to do an  
industrial-cleaning job,  
Ed and Maria, rare "perennials" to take  
four extra kids to dinner,  
John B., Bill, Morey, Carol, who-did-I miss  
and mostly Boom Boom Redpath  
Sweat box Beal  
Arny B-dot and Alan of the surf  
gracious hosts,  
family.

The beach shore  
lined with people  
in August  
all hanging on  
to the disappearing summer--  
hanging on  
for the moment  
to the vacation hiatus:  
that vulnerable meeting  
between friends, family,  
strangers, sun, wind, surf--  
then the moment is over  
never to be recaptured  
also  
never to be forgotten--  
August at the beach.

*Wayne,  
your neighbors  
over here in El-Hi  
think that flowers  
are still a pretty good way  
to say the complex thing--  
that we wish you strength  
and steadfastness each day,  
continued humor and a good spirit,  
abiding warmth from your family.*

*We appreciate your abilities and competence, Wayne,  
and we keep you ever in our thoughts  
and hearts, happy to be among your friends.*

## REMEMBERING AL REDPATH

Strive to enter by the narrow door  
the bible says this  
I've read it many times

but how narrow  
does a body need to get

As narrow as his hand  
with no muscle to write  
but a touch that carved valleys  
clean through to the heart

As slim as his mind that might slice off today  
but kept enough fat to reach back  
and remember roots  
and Door Redpath fruits  
and all the words to  
old presbyterian hymns.

Though his were the boniest legs,  
he could never enter  
strapped to the wide wheelchair.  
One has to imagine  
he smiled that great smile  
when he finally kicked those steel wheels  
this Saturday in March  
and strode unencumbered  
into heaven with Alice.

As the stroke cut deep into his words  
making the path in his brain narrow  
and rocky for him to scale and search  
for sentences to fit his feelings--  
he clung tight to the metaphors  
that fit him like a glove--  
business, meetings, 3M, sales, teamwork.  
We often thought God has to be  
Corporate to appreciate his prayers.

Without fat hands,  
and only the boniest legs  
and not enough speech  
to thicken any stew  
this man who liked to stride  
with the lions  
crept out softly as a lamb  
wearing only  
that giant smile  
this March 13th.

Welcome,  
Erin D.  
If we had a wish to give you  
this February eighteenth  
we'd wish you  
a long life  
among people who care  
dearly for you  
as Susan and Jim,  
their families  
and friends,  
care for you.

If we had a wish to give you  
we'd wish you  
just enough happiness  
and just enough sadness  
that your life feel  
full but not weighted,  
balanced but not boring.

If we had a wish to give you  
we'd wish you intellectual  
challenges all your life,  
adventures that tap  
wells of strength and creativity,  
experiences with many people--  
Both familiar and foreign.

If we had a wish to give you  
this February eighteenth  
we'd wish that one thing remains  
with you all your days--  
that you enjoy being yourself,  
Erin D.

You are here,  
you are loved.  
Welcome,  
Erin.

### **PERENNIALS**

Could you call  
this past year  
sweet?

No.

Achievements, fame  
TV, radio, news?  
Yes, plenty.  
Difficulties, ordeals,  
some deals, some awards?  
Oh yes, plenty.

Still,  
underneath it all  
those Perry Perennials  
keep growing:  
strength, courage--  
no pansy here;  
endurance, patience,  
and the long, life-giving  
stem of good will.

Some gardeners say  
"it's tilling the soil;"  
others call it "good breeding;"  
still others name it skill,  
knowing when and how to plant.  
Perry Perennials  
have all those attributes  
(and bone meal, too).  
But mostly  
it's in the timing--  
knowing when to work,  
when to be quiet  
and when to flower.

Now is the season  
for flowers.  
Odd isn't it  
that it's also  
Susan's birthday.  
Happy Birthday.

### **Messengers 2018**

There is some talk of journalists--today  
in a role made nearly sacred  
by today's threats, fake news, killings.

Different somewhat from biblical messengers Isaiah, Matthew, Paul-to name a few

Isaiah cautioned, "Pay attention and your soul will live."

Jeremiah prophesized, "plans for peace, reserving a future full of hope." Matthew questioned,  
"when was I a stranger and you took me in?" Paul clarified,  
"the spirit brings truth and truth sets you free."

Today the journalists' role is almost made sacred  
as they step into the vacuum of banal tweets  
and acts of normalized cruelty.  
There, with clarity in conflict,  
they do their jobs.

There have always been messengers -  
Needed now as never before--  
As the new year begins.  
2019.

Sources: Is. 55, Jer. 29, Matt. 25, Rom 8

### **TO ERV C. (1982)**

Scraps of paper,  
notes from meetings,  
telephone calls,  
doorknocking,  
asking, begging,  
cajoling volunteers,  
supporting, laughing,  
staying until dawn--  
humdrum  
and crises.  
It's all there  
yesterday  
and today.

It's all there  
from the Newsletter  
of 1972

to the East Calhoun News  
of 1982.

It's part of your life,

Erv C.

It's part of ours.

We document here  
your scraps of paper  
and meeting notes  
and watch them turn  
into piles and bundles  
of stories and cares  
we've all shared  
these ten years.

You were there at the beginning,  
starting these stacks,  
sometimes tying them with ribbons,  
sometimes scattering,  
discarding them  
and starting over.

Can scraps of paper,  
and photos of old events  
hold our thanks  
and hold our promise  
of continual communication  
that we know you care  
so deeply about?  
We hope so  
and say so  
with these pages  
of yesterday  
and today...



**Tony**

those blue eyes  
so like the tip of an iceberg  
hiding so much mystery beneath--  
we have only bits of icicles to remember  
    St. Peter picnics,  
    catching baseball scores on the fly,  
    eating those stale brownies  
        you made in bakery therapy  
    Christmas parties at 1812  
    and all the visits to third floor

We never really knew  
what those eyes saw  
what oceans covered you  
hiding you from all of us--  
us out in our separate boats  
Sometimes reaching out  
    with a lifeline,  
sometimes staying out at sea for a long time--

And in those last days  
your eyes haunted us all  
like beams from a lighthouse  
we could never quite reach.

We could only hope  
that the tip of the iceberg  
would at last feel at peace,  
complete and together  
with the whole iceberg,  
with Alice and Fred, Buster and Virginia,  
with Minnie Lou and Earnest--

and with Mary and Bess  
and all of us still on  
our life rafts  
reaching out to one another.

This family--  
it's full of life boats  
when you need them.

The heron  
at Lake of Isles  
hides  
most of the year.  
But once in a while  
it rises  
and we see its graceful  
Flight.

    "..those who trust in Yahweh  
    renew,their strength  
    and soar as on eagle's wings"

Sometimes  
the heron just stands there  
quietly  
in tall grass.  
We have only to notice it.  
    "Be still and know that I am God."

Still,  
most of the time  
it's hidden--  
like most important things.

Each spiritual session with you  
over these past 3 years  
is a little like noticing the heron:  
something beautiful  
that lies hidden and real  
beyond what our eyes usually see.

You draw it out  
from behind the tall grass  
and say--  
"just notice what rises to the surface."

Over and over  
you've lifted me up,  
as on eagle's wings,  
encouraged me to "be still ... "  
and constantly  
"notice what's there."

How I would like,  
on the occasion

of your birthday,  
to tell you:  
you make my heart soar,  
God bless you  
and I love you.

### **earth**

Heights of contemplation,  
stars,  
galaxies,  
angels heard on high,  
horizons beyond sight  
beyond reach  
lift minds  
in ecstasy.

But the pull  
of earth,  
of roots,  
of stables and mules  
brings-warm  
realness,  
cool facts--  
funny balance  
this earth.

### **simple**

The simple,  
Unadorned clay pot  
stands ready to be cut  
from the potter's wheel.  
Shaped like the hands of the potter,  
the pot points beyond itself  
to the shape of the moon,  
the shape of the earth.  
Simple,  
unmingled,  
homogeneous--  
the pot stands  
a pure and clear thing

made of mud clay  
speaking for the potter  
yet standing firm  
in the hands  
of the receiver--  
a simple exchange.

(1975)

### TURNING THE PAGE

This year  
turning into the last decade,  
toward the new century,  
we celebrate  
the same season  
still there as an old story  
we keep re-telling.

Each season  
repeats itself  
but it's never the same story:  
we're never the same.  
We hope we're turning  
toward a better world--  
witnessing big turns:  
like walls crumbling;  
and small turns--  
in our own lives  
where we struggle  
to make them more full,  
less serious,  
maybe even funny.

May you be where you are  
this year  
peacefully.  
And may you turn  
where you want and need to be  
this new year  
new decade  
new story ...

## A SMALL TURNING: A SHORT STORY

Consider a man  
who was on his way  
to join his wife  
at a New York hospital.  
Just as he got out of his car,  
a big delivery truck  
pulled up and hemmed him in.

"Do you know how long you'll be here?"  
he asked the truck driver,  
saying that he'd need to get his wife home quickly  
after she finished her medical tests.

It was a New York truck driver.

Clearly not pleased with being  
asked *anything*, the truck driver  
hurled out a line of abuse.  
The man, deciding to take his chances,  
said nothing and went in to meet his wife.

When he returned, he found  
The truck was gone and this note  
on his windshield:  
"I am sorry for the way  
I responded to your question.  
Pardon me please. And it is my wish  
that the person in the hospital  
will be better soon.  
God bless you.  
The truck driver."

--Reported in prose in *The New York Times*

It's just a brush  
reaching  
top to bottom  
like the bamboo  
stretching  
tall  
against the night moon.

Christmas,  
Hanukkah,  
a time to stretch  
from roots  
to all that is straight  
and strong,  
beyond  
our expectations.  
It's just a brush  
like a toothbrush,  
hair brush,  
scrub brush  
in my hand,  
your hand,  
hands across the world  
this Christmas,  
Hanukkah  
cleaning,  
sweeping,  
painting  
beauty  
straight through  
the everyday  
moon  
of our lives.

Whatever your brush--  
may it sweep happiness  
this holiday  
through your house

(1978)

What else can you say  
about a tree--  
so simple,  
trite almost.  
Yet it's Christmas  
and Hanukkah--  
and we need the tree  
for lights and celebrating.  
Trees, like us,  
so nameless  
so numberless  
in worlds of hostages  
and refugees.  
A tree is just there,  
not reckoning and counting,  
just ripening,  
unique in its space--  
sometimes squatting  
at the sides of life,  
sometimes rising tall  
in the middle of life.  
Trees and us,  
each of us  
important for a time,  
sometimes reckoning,  
often counting,  
always ripening.  
Each of us,  
this year, this holiday,  
is just here  
in this space  
and in this time  
celebrating something unique--  
some new work, a birth,  
a death, an unexpected joy.  
Yet each of us celebrates  
something universal--  
a hope for real peace,  
real destinies,  
in this space  
and beyond it,  
in this time  
and beyond this decade.

Trees and us  
this winter  
just here  
and somehow celebrating.  
Happy Holidays.

Like a jetty--  
    extending out into the sea  
    to influence the current,  
    to protect, to harbor--  
Yes, a little like a jetty  
is this Christmas and Hanukkah.  
It stands as one season,  
a harbor in a raging year.  
It makes us wade out  
into the sea of family,  
friends, colleagues,  
even strangers--  
and give gifts,  
giving away part of ourselves.

This holiday,  
we may not really  
influence the tide  
of today's problems  
or protect anybody.  
Still  
this Christmas and Hanukkah  
perhaps we stand as jettys,  
offering gifts  
that sustain us,  
that celebrate  
how life will always be  
a bigger sea  
than we can ever  
comprehend alone.  
But we can stand together  
perhaps,  
as on a jetty,  
and admire how vast  
and how simple  
is the message  
of Hanukkah's oil,  
of the child's birth.



## Pete's Hoops

In the alley  
behind our backyard  
Pete taught me  
how to make a layup shot  
right through the *hoop--swish*.  
He loved that sound.

How many hoops does a man jump through to know  
he's played the game well?

A two-handed dribbler--Peter:  
on the one hand, a very funny guy  
on the other, intensely serious

So--how many hoops does a man jump through?

Well, start with the career hoop:  
At first he stood out in the field  
with farmers and animal feed,  
then wheat and milling.

If he could teach his sister to shoot layups,  
in front of friends, taking no guff--  
then no surprise  
that he learned early in his career  
he was good with people.  
In human resources,  
--no hoop was too high to reach for a victory for both  
teams--worker and company.

How many hoops does a man jump through--

Family hoops: five kids  
5 great players on this team--  
mixing up positions as needed--  
a point guard one day, a center another.  
Some days they *all* were forwards.  
He never felt any string in the net too loose  
not to care for, tease out, or teach to  
with humor and quiet wisdom.  
A skill shared--anytime, not just with his own kids but  
through to the whole extended family.

Saving the best for last--the hoop that made Pete's life--  
the day he met Barb Donahue.  
Luckily she liked his "funny"  
and understood Pete's brand of intense serious.  
Right from the beginning  
they were a team.  
All he learned about the collaboration from work  
met its match and was surpassed in the day-to-day with  
Barb.

Both Pete and Barb were both rule-holders and rule  
benders.  
That's what nets are for--bending.  
These last few years,  
Barbara bent that hoop,  
brought it low for him to reach  
whatever he could reach--  
back in his mind  
or out with a smile to his kids, grandkids,  
friend or nurse--  
still a people person.

Barbara kept him hovering on the rim

She bent that hoop  
to hold him  
challenge him  
engage him  
and prepare him

for hoops of angels,

heroes,  
now welcoming our backyard,  
legendary, big brother--Pete.  
(2012)

## Kind.

A pale word  
and understated, too,  
maybe even wishy-washy  
for spirited  
Hanukkah and Christmas  
celebrations.

Yet  
Kind  
comes to mind  
this 1990 holiday.

Kind, the noun--  
means  
a related grouping,  
"a gentle kind and noble stock,"  
Shakespeare said.

Kind, the adjective--  
means  
fond, forbearing.  
Kindly--  
used to mean related by birth;  
today-a generous nature.  
Kin--  
the immediate family,  
or just close ties.

This year,  
my kin brings  
a new granddaughter,  
Alissa.  
She lives with me,  
reeking of joy  
and reminding me  
that simple kindnesses  
might be enough to grow on.

May your holiday  
reek with joy  
as you celebrate  
small kindnesses--  
the kind all your kin  
grows on.  
(1990)

*(Editor's note: This is a work in progress. Please check back for an updated version. She had a publisher's eye and shared her poems with careful design that this lacks. And there are a few more favorite poems that we'll add. Most of them are undated - though when written with a typewriter the courier font generally indicates 1970s to mid-'80s. So many poems were written for specific people and were named for them. She called out their full names with meaning; though in this context it seemed appropriate to omit last names.)*