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POETRY

WORDS AND ONE LINERS

Ric Masten

MY BEARD



This beard of mine

and I have had this beard
of mine for 57 years

for fifty seven years
I have tried to keep my chin
well undercover
this in spite of the fact
that a friend once told me

that my beard resembled
the scraggly underbrush
that grows in an arm pit

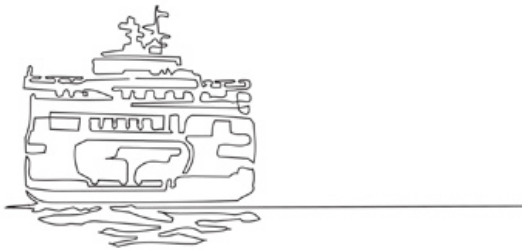
never the less
through 57 years
I have faithfully watered
and fertilized it
even when chemotherapy
thinned it down to a few
long gray wispy strands
that made me appear
like a Chinese wise man

but as always the best thing
I can tell you about my beard
is that it is still bugs the hell
out of my dear departed
mother
+++

.....AFTER WORD — At 20, I came back home from studying Art in Paris with a beard that I had worked diligently to grow. My mother hated it and begged me to shave it off. I held fast until after I had been married for about five years and we had gotten ourselves in to a bit of a financial bind. I went to Hoodie (mother's name was actually Hildreth but as a toddler I couldn't pronounce Hildreth and called her "Hoodie" and it stuck) and asked her if we could borrow enough to get out of debt. She eyed me: "OK," she said, "I will lend you what you need but only if you shave off that damn beard!" I swallowed hard and did it, holding up my end of the bargain. Of course I started growing it back the very next day much to mother's wringing of hands and calling me a cheater. I told her that I only said I would shave it off, which I did, but keeping it off was not in the bargain. I remember my daughter Jerri, who was about four at the time, telling me when she first saw me without the beard: "Dad you look like a cobra -- no chin."

...Then there was a time a friend of mine made the armpit remark mentioned above. He was right. You would think that someone who wanted to have a beard as much as I did would be blessed with a thick growth. No such luck but I'm holding out through thin and thinner (when on chemo) and will never give in to Hoodie!

BREMERTON FERRY.



The Bremerton Ferry carried me out on the cold clear water of my loneliness

.
 And the Bremerton Ferry
Carries me out
On the cold clear water
Of my loneliness

And again this evening
 She crosses my mind
 With a middle-aged man at the rail.
 Looking back,
 Smiling through tears.
 Looking back
 To lovers and friends left behind
 I'm too old
 For this summer love nonsense.
 And yet, I circle the decks

.

Filled with that same sweet ache,
 Long forgotten
 But now like a pulled tendon
 Remembered sharply.

....And the Bremerton Ferry
Carries me out
On the cold clear water
Of my loneliness

The passengers,
 The other passengers,
 On the periphery of my vision
 Are not unknown.
 There is something of you
 About them all.
 The tilt of a head,
 The way this one's hair falls,
 The figure there standing alone.
 I smile,
 And recognize you
 In every face I see.
 And it is enough
 That once in a great while
 Some total stranger
 Smiles back in the passageway
 And recognizes me

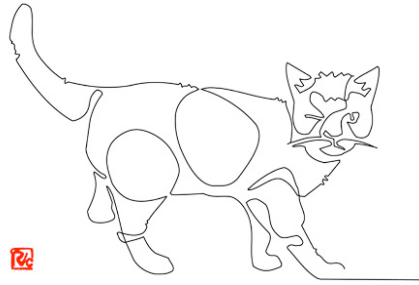
....And the Bremerton Ferry
Carries me out
On the cold clear water
Of my loneliness
 +++

AFTER WORD — This piece was written in 1970, the first time I was the theme speaker at the Unitarian Universalist Summer Institute at the Seabeck Conference Center near Bremerton, WA. I had to leave the conference early to do a program in Bellevue, on Sunday morning. After spending an emotional week turning strangers into dear dear friends it is only natural to feel what I was feeling as I took the Bremerton Ferry back to Seattle that Saturday evening. If you can play the realaudio rendition, know that the back up musicians were Starr King School for the Ministry students in their mid 20s, who are now all pushing 60. Time

NIMROD, THE MIGHTY HUNTER

Cancer patients dubbed 'terminal' always need to have goals — reasons to stay alive for!

..



*Nimrod — blind in one eye, scared, legless,
islands of skin left bare minus hair*

seven years out
from the "terminal" prognosis
this old cat begins year eight
acting feisty — feeling great
determined to live longer
than my omnipresent Mom
who always had to out do me
always had to show me up
however, to live longer than she
will take two more years
bringing the total to nine
now, I know the rumor
about cats having only nine lives
is just an old wives tail
but in my situation and in my condition
it does give one paws

and coming to the rescue
Nimrod, the mighty hunter
our family's big old orange tom cat
the day we got him from the pound
he was hit by a car and survived
a week or so later fell into a swimming pool
and damn near drowned
constantly treed by the neighbor's vicious dogs
had a hind leg loped off by a field mower
lost an eye in a fight with a coon

Nimrod might have been
blind in one eye, scared, legless,
islands of skin left bare minus hair
but in the end that tough beat up old tom
lived a lot more lives than nine
so there, Mom!
+++

AFTER WORD — When I was twelve years old our family lived out in the country in a house invested with mice. One day we went to the Pound and adopted a large homeless tom cat. My Dad named him "Nimrod, the Mighty Hunter." I didn't know the Biblical connection back then, Nimrod being the son of Cush. Anyway, the other day I got to wondering if I would live longer than my mother who died of lung cancer at 78 and from the dark deep reaches of my mind old Nimrod came to the rescue.

See also: Ric Masten's weekly WORDS & ONE-LINERS <http://www.ric-masten.net>

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