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POETRY

THE EARTH IS US

Mary Ann Wallace, MD

The cells of this earth
are our cells.
The wind that blows
across its surface is
the self same air that
we breathe.

Our life blood courses
through our veins
with no less certainty than
the rivers cascading to
the sea.

And what are we to make
of this?

Whether
we are of the earth
is not the question.
Rather, we should ask
what part we play.

Our capacity to choose
sets us apart from
the other beings here.

Choice implies
responsibility.

Not in the self
serving way
of subduing the earth,
Rather, we must make decisions
firmly based in

the sustenance of life.
Not just longevity
for our selves,
but for the ongoing life
of the planet, herself.

The fouling of her air
is the pollution of
our lungs.
Her filthy waters
will percolate through
the tributaries of
our veins
soon enough.

To fundamentally alter
the very DNA of her structures
is to mess with
our own.

How far will we go in
the name of "progress"
before we
stop
to appreciate what is
here?
Will we destroy
it All
with the "knowledge" we have
before we realize
that the earth
is us?

Words & One-Liners

Ric Masten

ACCEPTANCE



I'm stuffed into a silver suit....

is it enough
to be the attendant pumping gas
into a car driven by someone who works
the night shift
at a factory making parts
for one small component
in a rocket engine?

no — not when you want to fly

so let's have another space shot
only this time
not a carefully picked — highly trained
physically fit super intelligent
astronaut
this time
chosen by national lottery
an unqualified overweight
over sixty beer drinking
sports fan like me
someone who still doesn't know
how they go to the john up there

what a moment it would be
the world watching
as I'm stuffed into a silver suit
strapped onto the capsule couch
slapped on the helmet
bolted in
counted down
and blasted off

sent up into the night
into the stars
out — so far
I'd give anything to be back
where I am right now
+++

AFTER WORD — In rummaging around for something to post this week, only a couple of days before Christmas, I found myself totally empty handed. Surrounded by the commercial glitz and glitter that started a couple of weeks before Thanksgiving this year, with a senseless war continuing on with no end in sight, and with our planet under relentless attack what with global warming, global dimming, and heaven knows what else, I find myself yearning to get away from the hollow "Peace on earth, good will toward all" that is constantly ringing in my ears.

This feeling brought to mind the poem above, a piece written quite a few years ago having nothing to do with the Yuletide season. It is a bit of free verse that sent me off into the stars, so far away that in spite of everything it makes me feel good to be exactly "where I am right now." Cancer ridden and against all odds, I'm alive, feeling well, with Billie Barbara, my dear wife of 54 years, still at my side. Some of my middle-aged children and all of our three grandsons coming home for Christmas, I have decided that settling for "where I am right now" is not a bad gift to give myself this season.

THE BIXBY BRIDGE INCIDENT



Suddenly, the wind touched my hair
and I became aware of myself there on the
bridge.

the cup looked half empty
the big hand said forty-two past
and the word if there was one was tired
then suddenly the wind touched my hair
and I became aware of myself
there on the bridge
a weary old bird ready to leap
from the nest and fly blind
to the breathing sea below

me in my best bulky-knit sweater
calmly inching forward a great sadness
in my blue-gray eyes — hair blowing
aware now I paused and listened to the
night
for motor sound and looked for lights
but the world was empty
no one was coming to witness
my final scene — the grand finale

AFTER WORD — I thought that my "3rd" birthday poem would be a fitting and proper way to start the year off. Some have referred to it as a suicide poem, which is way off the mark.

The way I look at it is that each of us has three birthdays. Why we celebrate the "1st" one, the birth one, has always been a mystery to me. Our "1st" birthday only gave us existence and that is all. I mean, rocks exist.

Now the "2nd" birthday usually happens when we are ten to twelve years old. Actually, I was 13 when it suddenly occurred to me that one day I would die. Right there, playing in our driveway, I had my "2nd" birthday and realized that I was mortal. I must admit it was a scary moment but I received two valuable gifts that day — the gift of being fully SELF AWARE and the gift of TIME. Little children wander out into a busy street and are late for dinner because they don't fully know that they ARE. But when you realize that a day will come when you won't be any more, that is the day you know for sure you ARE.

and it was such a fantastic dramatic
moment
I decided
to come back and tell you all about it
laughing — shaking my head
I drove home but it wasn't
until I saw the shape of my own house
that I discovered the cup
had been half full all the time

I was told recently
that of all witnessed suicides
from the Golden Gate Bridge
in San Francisco, California
not one — not a single person
has been seen to go off on the ocean side
the horizon side
all — as of this writing
have been seen leaping back toward the
city
and that would be a hell of a thing
to discover half way down

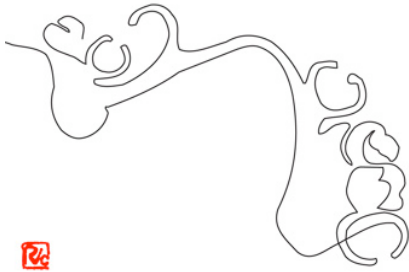
once years ago
I hung by my heels
was swatted — whaaaaaah — and decided
to suck air and live

on a bridge near Big Sur, California
in the summer of '71
I faced the same decision again
and as I write this
I realize
I am
three months old today
+++

Well, the poem above is about my "3rd" birthday. While out there on the bridge the moment that I decided not to jump is the moment that I chose to BE. "Chosen existence!" Like when a drunk or an addict goes into NA or AA. That day is a "3rd" birthday. I feel that too many among us are here and know that we are here but that is as far as it goes. We know that we are going to die but we don't really believe it. So this is an important birthday. And you don't just have one. I have had many. Like when I'm driving down the highway depressed and see a truck coming and think all I have to do is turn the wheel and.... but I don't. Happy 3rd birthday Ricky!!!

So, I hope you too find this week's offering a celebration of KNOWING, BELIEVING and BEING!!

ODE TO A REMOVABLE PARTIAL DENTURE



... but on the counter top
— in the sink it appears sinister!

feigning nonchalance
like an adolescent
purchasing a prophylactic
I furtively
bought a tube of Fixodent today

a disturbing experience
although I am no stranger to the realm
of crowns bridges and caps...
remove the fixed frontal facades
and I'm left with nothing
but pegs notches and gaps
the sunny smile you see
is not the one I displayed in youth
but once the dentists artistry
is cemented down
and the tongue wearies of exploration
one tends to forget the truth

receding hairline
trifocals - liver spots
all have been taken in stride
but not this recent oral acquisition
this sculpted wire amalgam

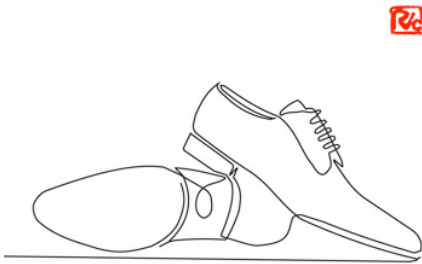
barbed and hooked where it bends
pink cocktail olives
stuffed with ivory pimentos
skewered at both ends

in place it magically fits in
but on the counter top — in the sink
it appears sinister
like some gleaming
surgical device
left here by intruders
from outer space
perhaps
an instrument of torture
dating from the Inquisition
my natural exuberance
curbed
by this cruel Spanish bit

and to think
for the rest of my life
I must play host
to this illusive parasite
this spiny-finned pilot fish
watching it
dart in and out of my mouth
knowing that
it is secretly holed up
somewhere in there
waiting to eat
and although
it does feel good
to dine with molars again
symbolically
the moment this metallic interloper
was parked in my mouth
marked for me
the beginning of the end
+++

AFTER WORD — I doubt that if you are 25 or younger you will understand this poem. I mean with your whole being you are 50 I think you will find something vaguely familiar about the Ode above. If you are 75 or older you will probably think I wrote this week's poetic observation about you.

COMING HOME..



Oxfords hastily bought — a size too small.

the continuing story
of a traveling salesman continues
this time we find him running
out of an airport gift shop
with a cap pistol and a doll
a surprise for the kids

but like oxfords hastily bought
a size too small
(the kids I remembered were not kids at all)

"I think I've been gone longer than I thought."
cried old Saint Nick as ever ho-ho-ho-ing
as ever coming and going
giving the children puppies for Christmas...
never there when the dog died

but it's okay Dad — it's all right
they say there is no such thing as a bad parent
they say even people who batter their
offspring
are doing the best they know how to do

and you can tell that
to the boxes that were never opened
you can tell that to the shoes that pinch
+++

AFTER WORD — This time of year is a retrospective time for me. At the height of my career I spent at least half year out on the road "Coffee Table Dancing." And sadly that was when my kids were young and could have us father around the house instead of off doing his thing in hinterlands. Of course my children, now in their late forties and early fifties, have forgiven me. But around the holidays I find myself lying on the bed staring at the ceiling wondering about all the dance recitals and football games I missed chasing after my dream.

BACK TO BASICS



Something like a spelling bee

from a system of education
 wherein if it can't be measured
 it will have to be ignored
 comes word that entire high school assembly
 required to sit through a poetry reading
 left at the bell convinced
 that they had just had a free period

the report cannot be verified though
 as the teaching staff also took the event
 to be a free period and spent it in limbo
 otherwise known as the Faculty room

and who can blame them?
 they know you only emerge
 from something like a spelling bee
 with a clear unmistakable winner

the rest of us
 the functionally illiterate 5,000
 are left with seven loaves and two fish
 to divvy up for dinner

and don't ask for more
 the age of miracles is past
 +++

AFTER WORD — Back when I was on the road, I would often be called upon to do an all-school high school assembly and because of being someone with reading difficulties I wrote song lyrics first and then began composing what I call "speaking poems," accessible verse crafted to be performed — to enter the ear, rather than lie lifeless on the printed page waiting to be eyeballed. Being a bit of a bard really helped me with a high school audience.

I always found that once I let the students know that I was alive and there in person — not an image on a DVD, TV, movie or printed page — that I was a living breathing human being with feelings and that I would call them on it if I saw someone in the audience treating me as if I wasn't there. I then would begin my reading and invariably a couple of students would start whispering, giggling and nudging each other. As promised I would stop mid-sentence and say: "Hey, you there in the fourth row. Why are you talking while I'm trying to perform a poem? Don't you know that I can see you?" After that I would tell the entire assembly: "I'm going to leave the microphone now and go down and read those students the poem I wrote about my friend's son who committed suicide while on an acid trip by putting his head on a railroad track." Then, true to my word I'd jump down from the stage and go to where the disruptive students were and recite the afore mentioned poem to an assembly hall that had suddenly become absolutely silent. After that I'd climb back up on the stage and from then on the students were quiet and respectful and would even laugh at my attempts at humor. In 35 years on the road this approach never failed me.

One thing bothered me though. There always seemed to be a conspicuous lack of teachers in the audience. Which would prompt me to ask the English teachers to please hold their hands up. Usually, there were very few. So I would say to the kids: "Hot dog!! You are going to get to teach your teachers a lesson! When next you meet with your English class, ask your teacher what she or he thought of the poet you were forced to listen to." If you discover that they weren't here you can say: "Well, how am I supposed to know if the poet was any good if you skipped out to drink coffee in the faculty room while we were forced to spend 50 minutes with a poet! Maybe next time you will also attend the required assemblies so that we students can get your take on the event." I must admit I have always had a very perverse nature! :o)

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