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POETRY

(See also poetry in Andrea Mathieson's article)

WORDS & ONE-LINERS

Ric Masten

ANATOMY OF A ZEALOT..



Never mind the bones of dinosaurs.

Machines
 have been devised
 to accurately measure the age
 of found objects.
 So what we have here

must certainly be the remains
 of Noah's Ark.
 Never mind
 the bones of dinosaurs.
 They were cleverly put here
 to test our faith."

in matters religious
 and/or political
 one reaches the truth
 only
 through good hard
 investigative thought
 however when one
 is thoroughly convinced
 that the truth is found
 it then
 becomes necessary
 to stop thinking
 +++

AFTER WORD — Last week, the email response to LIGHT BRINGERS was one of the largest that a single W&O posting has ever received. In fact I sent this week's ANATOMY OF A ZEALOT as my response to many of your responses. Therefore, in a way, you dear readers selected what this week's posting would be. The "truth" being that sacred something human beings are willing to die for and kill each other over. Sadly, if zealots continue operating out of political or religious "truth," the mess that the world presently finds itself embroiled in will probably not change very much.

....In the late 1960s & early '70s, when I was a touring folksinger/songwriter, I remember one long haired lad coming up out of an audience in a college somewhere, saying: "Your songs are full of questions, old man (I was in my forties then and not to be trusted), but I didn't hear you offer us one usable answer." I laughed and responded that he must be a pilgrim in search of THE answer. And that I DID have one usable answer (ultimate truth), which is that we all will spend the rest of our lives in search of THE answer, knowing that we will never find it. It is the search that rules not the finding." This remark did not go over all that well back then, nor would it now, I guess.

JERRI'S GARDEN



*A stone Kwan Yin
compassionate and serene*

together on Green Ridge
in Jerri's mystical garden
David and Lindy,
refugees up from the LA basin
are spell bound by the atmosphere
my daughter has magically
fashioned to inspire and enchant

lily pads harbored in reflecting pools
surrounded by blossoms of every
conceivable color and kind
peeking out from behind
sword fern and broad leaf plant
a stone Kwan Yin
compassionate and serene
stands beside a red banana tree
Buddha meditates
at the foot of a viridian bamboo screen
terra-cotta angles and marble saints
kneel here and there
half hidden in the lush foliage
a bronze frog forever ready to leap
a ceramic turtle sunning itself
on a mossy rock asleep

David takes the moment in exclaiming
"Wow, I can't wait to come back here
again!"
the statement sending us into the
calendar
intent on locating
a tomorrow that may never come
our focus veering away
far from the here and now
how absent
we humans often are
+++

AFTER WORD — A couple of weeks ago our friends David and Lindy Joyce paid us a visit and we walked up to the house my daughter Jerri and her husband have built on our upper property. Jerri has the greenest thumb I have ever known. Unlike me she can poke any stick into the ground and it will sprout. We were all sitting around together in her wonder full greenery and suddenly David says: "Here I am exactly where I want to be wasting the "now" moment wondering when we can visit again."

A "found poem." that perfectly underlines what I have been going through this Summer as April and Ellen, my two other daughters were here with their families visiting from where they live on the East coast. And there I was doing exactly what David did wasting valuable time wondering when they would come visiting us again. It makes me wonder how much of my life I have missed.

THE LETTING GO



The heavy ceramic jar

THE LETTING GO

"Hefting the heavy ceramic jar
the mortician's apprentice handed it over
'He certainly was a big fella wasn't he?'
I mean, can you imagine
anyone being that insensitive
to a widow of only four days?"

Helen described the dreadful ordeal
as she lovingly lifted Joe from the car floor
"But that was nine months ago
and I've done the grief work.
God knows I've done that
and I think I'm ready now to let him go."

in single file we followed Bixby Creek
to the place of Joe's choosing
wife and first wife - son and stepsons
their girl friends - my family and me
keeping pace with our memories

roommates at boarding school
our friendship
didn't seep away after graduation
it deepened

Joe becoming my zen friend and teacher
the two of us always joking about death
playing with the existential fear
laughing at the mere thought
of ending up in a hermetically sealed
upholstered box
a stiff grinning leather effigy
all spiffed up in an elegant
smoking jacket — how Egyptian!

but that was then

AFTER WORD — This week's posting pretty much speaks for itself. My dear friend Joe Dawkins was a much beloved teacher in a junior high in Alameda, California. It is surprising that someone with such a big heart would be taken out by heart failure.

Joe loved the Big Sur area and in fact named his son Sur. And it was here that he wished his ashes would be scattered. It has been over a decade now since the above took place on the beach below Bixby Bridge. It was a defining moment in my life and the thought of letting go of Joe moves me still.

and this was the sandy shore
below Bixby bridge
where we could sit a spell in a close circle
listening to the roar of the Pacific
underscore our words of farewell

then
and I want to get this part right
there is the sight of Helen
knee-deep in the boiling surf
denim pant legs darkening
kelly green sweater damp
bent over slightly
one hand tightly clutching Joe to her heart
the other cramped at the mouth of the jar
a thin figure staggering helplessly
against the tide
"Joe, I don't know how to do this!
she cried
"Help me somebody!"

which we did
all of us wading in
to take a small measure of Joe in hand
grip loosening slowly
the granules sifting through our fingers
drifting on to the foaming wash
on to the coarse wet sand
doing this again and again
strangely comforted at how easily
one becomes part
of the beach part of the whole
from start to finish Joe never could
pass up an opportunity to teach

as for Helen
I knew she'd be all right
when involved in this activity
for more than a little while
I was surprised to find that the urn
was still nearly half full
and looking up at me
cheeks streaked
and glistening with tears
she smiled broadly
"He certainly was a big fella
wasn't he?"

+++

THE SETUP — Last week's posting BACK TO BASICS (in the Archives on the left if you didn't see it) generated a number of messages from people who wanted to see the poem I used to read to get the attention of unruly high school students during assemblies. Probably the stark subject matter did as much to quiet the audience as the poet jumping down off the stage to read it to the noisy students to prove he was alive, really there in person, and would respond to their rudeness. So, I got busy and created a one-liner to go along with the piece, and now I present it to you.

the TRAIN



"The train is coming..."

he must have made up his mind in the
night
because after a cheerful breakfast
he quietly left the house
and walked to the railroad tracks
where he sat down and waited
his cheek resting on the cold steel rail
three hours he waited
for the train to come... and it came

three hours
that's a long time... a lifetime
what did he do with it?
did he wander back through the weed
patch
of his nineteen years
enjoying what few flowers had
bloomed there?
or did he wait like so many of us
with nothing more on his mind
than
the train is coming
the train is coming
the train is co...

father of the boy
and mother
I am here and at the same time with you
and I am crying for Chris
who caught the acid train out of here
and for you
and me
and that's alright
for how else would I know
what laughter is?

at times
one looks back on his accomplishments
and they do seem meaningless
and I must say
I have looked upon the books and CDs
I have produced for sale
those spiritual experiences you can
purchase
and play in the privacy of your own
living room
as just so much bullshit

and then your note
describing the dark night you spent
reading and listening to my words
a note ending with your simple thanks
and I am reminded of a wise old man
who once rapped me with his cane
and said:
....."Do not say bullshit to be
profane.
.....It is used to help things live
.....and grow."
+++

THE LIGHT BRINGERS



Two mantis-like creatures

as a child
I remember my father
taking me to the beach on dark nights
to see the phosphorus
“the light bringers”
tiny organisms

I don't know their official scientific name
but at a certain time of the year
they would come — billions of them
washing in to our coastal waters
and we would go
to walk the waterline like gods
making fiery footprints in the sand

“They light up as they die.”
father would say
and I would stamp my foot
delighted

perhaps we too have crawled
from that very same sea
and evolved to the place where we
will burn ourselves from the heavens
in some kind of holocaust

and watching from afar
two mantis-like creatures
touch anterior legs as we flame out
whispering excitedly
“Shooting star! Make a wish!”

+++

AFTER WORD — This one comes directly out of the nightly news as seen on CNN. The Apocalypse people are out in the street having a field day. "The rapture is coming!" "The rapture is coming!" If anything, I am a fallen Buddhist forced to observe present day goings on up close and personal. I have a grandson who is a medic in the military. "Make a wish?" — absurd and naive as it may sound, my wish would be for peace on earth.

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