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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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