

*Poems for
a Rainy Day*



By Edward Phillips

Poems for a Rainy Day
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(Unless otherwise noted)
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Dedication

These poems are dedicated to all those who find something in poetry that lifts your spirit, or inspires you, or makes you laugh, or causes you to reflect for more than a moment on what is important in your life.

A Message from the Author

Hello readers. We may as well be friends because poetry is personal, and personal things are better shared with friends.

This collection of poems represents nearly a lifetime of living, learning, and observing, so it is more than just a slice of life. I occasionally write a poem with someone in mind, but mostly it's for anyone who enjoys language, and humor, and the look of love; or someone who recognizes the written word as a permanent record of who we are, what we enjoy, and what we value. Still, none of us needs experience either as a writer or as a critic to enjoy poetry. You are permitted to draw from the words on these pages any feeling that you dare to feel—for or against whatever connections are made between your sensibilities and the passages you read. Embrace them. Just don't give me too much credit or blame. 😊

I wrote most of these poems during the last 8 years while a member of the writers' forum known as Authors Den, even though my recollections go back much further. This venue of thousands of poets and other writers is ideal for those of us who are not professional writers, at least in the sense that we are not paid for our offerings. But we are still compensated in a very personal way: We form close ties with other writers that we have met if only on a spiritual level. And that payoff is priceless! Words and thoughts that arise from the soul and connect with others form bonds that likely can never be broken.

I draw from many different interests and circumstances mainly to test my skills of expression and to tap murky horizons with the hope that each composition might have appeal to different readers with different interests. Each topic posed a new set of challenges. But in the end good writing is like excellence in the pursuit of any endeavor: We rarely achieve at our best, but when we do, it is something special that makes the effort worthwhile.

To me poetry is the medium for letting you find your own feelings about any given subject matter, not mine or somebody else's. I therefore write in any format that seems to fit the subject at hand, sometimes with punctuation, sometimes not, rarely giving a lot of

attention to grammatical precision. You might call me a minimalist, however, in that I use very few adjectives and adverbs in my poems. To me those modifiers are intruders that try to tell you what to think or to feel. Modifiers are not good substitutes for your own imagination or for your reverie that you have cultivated from your experiences. Who am I to tell you or anyone what to think, or to feel, or to retain? Critics may not like the absence of all those wordy intruders, but these renderings are for my friends and those who follow their own instincts, not for critics.

From my vantage point I also call events after a certain age “life on the plateau.” This is the place and the time in which some of us tend to separate ourselves from the mundane worries that bother younger dwellers. On the plateau we try to accept all our shortcomings, our frailties, and our limitations and learn how to deal with the balance of our days with as much grace and dignity as possible. We don’t have the time to worry about things over which we have no control or that take too much energy with too little payoff. It’s an attitude that works for me, at least most of the time.

With that mental baggage off my chest, I hope you enjoy these poems.

P.S. This picture was taken when I was 63. I’m a little older today, but who’s counting? Not me.



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I.

Inspiration Intended



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What is poetry?

Poetry is about us and our place in the universe
It is our connection to all that is past, all that is now
And all that ever will be;
But it comes alive when it tells us more about
Who we are, why we live, and about our connection to
What we can be in our most glorious moments
Of existence.

Prose and music sustain us but
Poetry lets us define ourselves
While it finds new venues in which to thrive;
It is the magic of flight
The persistence of thoughts
And the transcendence of
Ourselves beyond all cosmic limitations.

In our expanding universe where
Time and space merge and
Unknown forces can crush our dreams
Poetry allows us to overcome
Even that which we do not understand;
Before we reach destinations or
Even before we begin our journey.

(cont'd >>)

Poetry is the imagination within our souls
A glimpse and a portrait of love;
It gives shape and purpose to
The tiniest quantum forces or to
Our wildest astro-projections.

Ultimately poetry connects us
To the source of all that is
And to all that can be—
It is our most profound linguistic
response to
The gift that is life.

Freedom

It's not about profits
It's not about taking
It is about justice
And giving and making.

It's about who we are
Our present and past
It's the deeds that we value
The things that can last.

It starts deep within us
It comes from our souls
It's the stuff that defines us
Our dreams and our goals.

It's our best link to heaven
When all's said and done.
It's the good that's within us
It's our sky and our sun.

It's more than our words
And more than our thoughts
And more than our hopes
And more than our oughts.

It's ourselves looking back
When we look in the mirror
It's our history our honor
It's the things we hold dear.

When we stand all alone
In the silence of night
And hear a voice calling
Or see a faint light.

(cont'd >>)

It's that moment of truth
When the shroud is pulled back
When the angels are crying
And we're under attack.

It's our inner voice saying
It's the right thing to do
It's humanity praying
For me and for you.

When all doubt has been lifted
Though our actions are flawed
We know we are free
In the presence of God.

Push On

With barely enough to feed myself
Barely enough to survive
Barely enough to make the fight
Barely enough for life.
Depression hit the land and me
I fell into the depths
Consumed by alcohol
It ravaged what was left.
I zombied into the thick of things
Without a guiding compass
Transgressed against the will of God
A hulk of unearthly pride.
Survive I did until one day
I realized what a wasted life I'd led
I had better turn the rest around
Or soon I'd wake up dead.
And so I first began to crawl
And as I inched along
There was no happiness no song
No inspirational lift on which to cling
No rope to pull myself along
No trumpets blared
No song of praise
Not a solitary thing
But a tiny inner voice
That said push on
It won't get easier.
Just do it.
Gains come in tiny little steps
Tough it out the same way
That you toughed it in.
It's what you chose
Because somewhere deep
Within your soul
You knew you had the grit.
Push on young man

(cont'd >>)

And never stop
You have a goal to reach
It's one that you alone set
Without a cheering throng
Now get on your feet
And run like the wind
You've been down
Far too long,
And when you tire
Dig deeper and longer
And hold your head up higher
And don't look back
Through all your faults
You never killed those
Demons that track and
Follow you.

What I Live for

I live to choose what's right for me
To maximize my will
To find the things that I can do
Beyond a moment's thrill:
To touch a heart to bend a mind
Away from evil's reach
To educate and cultivate
And soothe but never preach.

This world is full of challenges
Along every lonely ridge
When outward troubles dim my eye
I try to build a bridge
Above the flames of dark and night
So all the world can see
There's so much more
From shore to shore
On which we can agree.

Still I am impatient
And cannot wait
For time to tear down wrongs
The hungry and the weak require
I break away from throngs—
And boldly take that daring step
That others say is wrong
And find my footing
Whate'er the cost
That's right where I belong.

The devil has his due they say
There's good in everyone
Judge not my sins forget my wins
Until the race is won.
And when that day at last is here
I will not look for praise
May we both arrive
At the mountain's top
Although in different ways.

To a Poet Sublime

I left a note for you today my dear Edna St. Vincent Millay
Gone from this world since one 1950's day;
I never met you never felt the reach of your charms
Never knew the gentleness of your touch nor your outstretched arms;

Your words in their journey travelled forward in time
And found my empty spirit immersed in unforgiving rhyme;
What immortalized gifts you gave for all of us to read
Like a flower blooming again from a lost and wind-blown seed;

Inspiration comes so slowly in times like these
With lies and double dealing spreading like disease;
Your sonnets ring so pure and pleasant for all to hear
You also fought for justice with a voice that was strong and oh so clear;

I'm so glad I found you out among the flowers
Where I can drink you in for hours and hours and hours;
Alas there is so little time to pause and taste of the divine
And so I must learn more of you by reading line by line;
Your gentle words crafted with tender loving care
Yet for now that is enough for me and you to share.

There's an incredible blind girl who bags groceries near my house. She greets everyone with poise, charm, and wonder. She never fumbles or makes a mistake. I am in awe of her, and I know my feelings are shared by many.

For Tiffany

To know her is to love her
With a certainty that's reliable
She stands out without trying
A truth that's undeniable.
Her presence always changes you
Whatever your disposition
She awakens the best that's in you
She's real not supposition.

Always caring ever smiling
With an understanding grace
There's an aura that surrounds her
Most notable in her face.
You never see her come or go
But you know when she is there
There's a certain pure angelic glow
That swishes through the air.

She's a love affair for one and all
A connection to our souls
She glorifies the best that's in us
The fulfillment of our goals.
She's of this world in mind and heart
With charm as well as duty,
She's an endless theme of love's embrace
A triumph of truth and beauty.

She's an angel sent from Heaven
As sure as there's such a place
With a certainty that shows in all she does
You can see it in her face.
Her eyes are clear but cannot see
Her blindness stems from birth
Yet she sees with perfect clarity
With goodness love and mirth.

The Strength to Carry On

Do not compare your life to mine
Do not look to me for blame
No two lives are ever alike no dreams are quite the same
The challenges assigned to you though harsh
Were yours to overcome
They gave you the grit to carry on
The will to not succumb.

What does not kill you makes you stronger
Adversity lingers as days grow longer
Life rarely grants you favors
Still do not give in
To those who hate
And wear your patience thin.

There was a time in days long past
When I thought that grief would last and last
In those times the wisest words
To fall back on were these:
This too shall pass.

I believe there comes a time
That everyone must face
I will call it that grand accounting
Not a judgment but a supreme realization
Of all the deeds
That you must feel
Down to the final chord
Before you can rise up again
From where such things are stored.

And one more thing about beliefs
They may never let you shine
But they can pick you up
When you need it most
And lead you to the finish line.



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To My Best Friend

You never walked upon the floor your body was too frail
You never spent a day in school you never set a sail
You never left to fight a war you never flew a jet
You never hit a homerun except with everyone you met.

Let's talk about the things you did like learn a thousand songs
You memorized the dictionary you taught me right from wrong
You taught me how to read and write before I ever went to school
My teachers thought I was so bright, well, you made me look so cool.

Your life ended long before you ever had your chance
Instead you coached me for the game and with the skills to dance
Fate threw the kitchen sink at me I caught it in my teeth
I lost the top row in that fight and a few that were beneath.

But with your help I grabbed a chunk and wrestled it to the ground
I stomped and kicked and bludgeoned it and here is what I found—
The winners in this thing called life are not the strong with money
It's those who throw that hidden switch and make the dark days sunny.

The strongest man who ever lived could never tie your shoes
The weakest man who never quits is the one that you would choose
And so would I, my dearest friend, my mentor like no other
You were the greatest gift of all, thank God for you, my brother.

Follow Me!

The world is full of hurdles and fences
And other defenses
That keep you from reaching the top
They're such an impediment that only the sediment
Can soften your fall when you flop.

Yes you can get on your feet hear that far distant beat
Of the drummer who beckons you on
But when you've gathered your senses and other pretenses
That give you an inkling of gain
A mallet will whack you
A tyrant will smack you
And bring on a new round of pain.

So it's one step forward and two steps backward
As you travel on life's weary path
As again and again thru the wind and the rain
You encounter another new wrath.

The stabs will get deeper the barbs will get cheaper
As a new knife cleaves another new scar
And when your eyes run out of tears
And your soul loses its fears
Some yahoo will reset the bar.
Higher.

Don't whine and don't yelp
And don't ask for help
As you slide thru the ick and the goo
Just follow my lead and you will succeed
I'm only one step ahead of you.

Embracing Excellence

We know it when we see it
When we feel it hear it or sing it
Whether in the arts or sciences
It is the promise of the pursuit
It is finding the good
It rewards the intricate skills of the
Artisan or the doer or the thinker
It is us imitating nature
Looking beyond our horizons
Toward a standard we cannot see.
Only then do we extend our skills
Our sensibilities
And our expectations
Beyond the ordinary
Beyond our own limits where we can
Taste a sense of the divine.
It is a journey
An attitude
A passion
A habit
Always striving always pushing
For more
Expecting nothing for it but
To find the best that is within us.
It does not live for accolades
It is its own reward
It is how we can truly examine life
How we search for meaning
Align our paths with truth.
It is how we give back for
This gift we know as life.

To A Special Lady

"You can't be brave if you've only had wonderful things happen to you." –Mary Tyler Moore

It is true that she turned the world on with her smile
But they were smiles that never went away;
She was a looker from head to toe
But her looks were surpassed by her charm
Her persistence and her astounding talent;
She never preached but she taught us much
With her grace her wit and her optimism;

She was the leader of an entire movement
And she probably did not know it;
It was about women and so much more
It was about all of us the human spirit;
She probed where few would dare go
In pursuit of dignity and purpose;
And she carried those goals with her
All the days of her life;

How lucky we were to watch her
To observe sheer class and poetry in motion;
Few people could light up a room or a city
Like this lady with the biggest eyes and
The most innocent of all smiles;
She will always be remembered
For her inner beauty and her kindness
Because she touched us with those traits
And raised us up to become a lot better
Than we were but knew we could be;

She will always be our lady with the flying hat
That she tossed into the air among the angels
Where it stayed in tribute to them
To her and to us.

Stairway to the Stars

To climb to lift to facilitate with engineering skill
To change the view twixt me and you where there's more than just the will.
To expand horizons to grasp the call to rise to heaven's door
And then to see beyond the wall or what's a heaven for?

The sun the sea the wind and rain have opened many minds
Created paths and shower baths among the clinging vines.
But none has done so with more aplomb than a single human thought
That changed the way we see ourselves and what our deeds have wrought.

If tears could build a stairway there'd be miles of avenues
Going up and down and sideways with little left to choose.
Our worries and our woes would vanish into small receding streams
They'd simply dry up and wash away with the stuff of broken dreams.

There's no greater joy to be found among the multitude of souls
Than to find a rejuvenated heart that now proclaims its elevated goals.
It seeks new vistas and wonders where none had been before
And lights a spark within the dark revealing so much more.

But this I say to one and all and be ever mindful of it
Know that moment when it comes and even learn to love it.
And seize it with the certainty and the strength that stems from youth
The stairway to the stars lies just before the illusory path to truth.

Grit

Like an animated cartoon
We live and love yet fail in our
Quest for something we cannot define;
Still we search and get on with the
Battering when half a loaf cannot
Sustain what our soul requires;
The unrequited life is
Only for the strong
When yielding means
Servitude
And acquiescence is the
Curse of the oppressed;
Or so the tale is told...
You can say what you want
But those who master this
Thing called life
Are not the beautiful or
The wealthy or even
The healthy
It belongs to those who
Dare to dream
Who reach for the stars
With their toes
Or their nose
And who lift our spirits
By their actions that
Proclaim
As long as I have a voice
And the need to survive
My soul is not for sale and
I will not be
Conquered.

Find Your Destiny

Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream
Of a time when all would be judged
Not by the color of their skin but
By the content of their character.
He dreamed dreams that

Identified his mission on Earth.
They told him of things
Lacking in this world.
I have a dream that has repeated
For more than 40 years.
I run into obstacle after obstacle
Blocking, thwarting, impeding,
Preventing me from my destination.
Until recently I had never asked:
What is my destination?
What is so lacking in my life
That it has disturbed my subconscious
For so long? Today I listened
For the answer and I heard
A thousand voices reply:

*You are at your destination.
Where is the health care?
Where is education for all?
Where are the jobs?
Who is being denied marriage?
Where is the housing?
Where is the food?
Where is the social mobility?
Where is the freedom?
Where is life?
Where is liberty?
Where is happiness?
What demon stains your soul?
Who puts color ahead of character?
Who steals your potential and your future?*

(cont'd >>)

*Your demon's name is Injustice --
And he hates you.*

*Your mission is to defeat him
Do not let him define your character
Others have told you...
The pen is mightier than the sword
Your Destiny has found you
Now go and find your Destiny.*

The Conquest

It's been ugly and confusing
Relentless and bemusing
But it was all meant just for me;
And so I reached only for the parts
That needed changing or new starts
And left the rest for others more or less like me...

Starry nights were my personal reverie
They were all that they could be;
I needed only to fill in the blanks
Before I could give thanks
For this gift of life that was
Handed to me...

Oh I kicked and I hollered
Did not want to be collared
And dropped into a lifeless neutrality;
Another domino that fell
Lifeless as could be
While the world passed me by
Enroute to its destiny...

Uncaring and undaunted
I was jabbed and I was taunted
Still I plunged into the sea;
Not knowing I had chosen
A course that was purposefully frozen
And put there just for me...

A thousand battles perhaps more
I lost them all
Even went to war
No heroics there for me;
With no praise no thanks or sharing
No trumpets triumphantly blaring
No accolades for me.

(cont'd >>)

And now my days are few
What's new is old
What's old is new
What can be said now about me?

Only this...
He came he saw
He conquered nothing at all
Except himself--
But what a fight it was to see.

In Tribute to Rudyard Kipling

I hail your words they pierce my brain
They touch my very soul
They linger like a bold refrain
They show me a true goal.

They reach the limits of intention
And then they push beyond
They cling with artful unpretention
Like an eternal bond.

Inspiration is the gift from those
Who shrink away from noise
And find that poetry and prose
Are beauty style and poise.

No Olympian ever ran as fast
As one who filled each minute
With sixty seconds worth of distance run
In measured strides that win it.

May we find peace at Heaven's door
When we have won the prize
And there inscribed are your wise words—
“Don't look too good nor talk too wise.”

You graced our shores with wisdom
You mocked defeat here as you ran
We'll not find you among the kings
But with the common man.

Tough Times

Life comes in dribs and drabs
But experience plays hide and seek upon your mind
Until that moment when you cannot change it—
And then it hits you hard between your eyes
And knocks you senseless;

You awaken in a parallel universe
One that you did not ask for and did not want.
Dazed you collect your sensibilities
And arise to find it is too late to adjust
And so you seethe and move down avenues of
Confusion and anger and self-doubt.

It's too late to swing and curse the darkness
What's done is done
And you are once again the vanquished
From circumstances written by your fate.

Disarmed disjointed and bewildered
You tread a lonely path lined with thistles and briars
Until you feel the pieces of your life
Slowly meld into a lumpy whole.

You swallow hard and move on knowing
That this too should pass
But you are changed forever
With fewer teeth and another battle scar
Situated right where you least wanted it.

In It to Win It

I am a work in progress.
I want to be a kinder, more caring, more loving person,
who is more understanding, more tolerant, and
more forgiving;
I will never judge you
because I am God's creation
and he doesn't make cheap imitations
of himself.

Early in life I caught a foot in my mouth—
Not my own, but someone's.
It doesn't matter whose because there were too many.
The only way I could fight back was to be
A huge disappointment to my attackers.
I excelled.
Not at everything but at most things that counted with me.

I had no interest in their outcomes.
I filled in the blanks where I had lost my teeth.
I left footprints where I was not supposed to.
I smothered my failures with footprints.
They followed me everywhere
Reminding me that one day I could look back at them
And see where they were pointing.

For miles they were two steps forward and
Three steps backward until one day
When they became three steps forward
And two steps backward.
And now there is no looking back.

Now I am catching up.
And one day I am convinced
I will find myself crossing the starting line
With no place to go but
Forward.

Courage is Our Calling

There's more to life than being a passenger.

—Amelia Earhart

Courage is a mindset to want always to stand on the right side of history.

Courage is the resolve to do what our conscience tells us is the right thing to do.

Courage is action to lead, follow, or get out of the way according to our abilities.

Courage is the desire to pay our fair share in the cause of justice.

Courage defends our goals and our vision when we know they define us.

Courage helps a child, the poor, the sick, the disabled, the disadvantaged, the elderly.

Courage gives without judging.

Courage speaks with no expectation of reward.

Courage never deals in lies or deceit.

Courage finds inspiration in our heritage.

Courage listens to the wisdom of the ages.

Courage honors our past.

Courage distills our present.

Courage sets the vision for our future.

Courage asks for nothing in return.

Courage is its own motivation.

Courage is its own reward.

Courage is a warrior, a writer, a speaker, a teacher, a scientist, a dancer, a builder, an achiever in life.

Courage is our calling.

To Hell with Heresy

For Giordano Bruno, 1458-1600

There once was a man who roamed the land
He examined life as scientist mathematician
Philosopher astronomer and poet
A free thinker whose mind was his treasure
He challenged the status quo
He challenged church clerics.

They drove a spike thru his tongue
And burned him at the stake
Along with thousands more
For the audacity of speaking against
False beliefs and in favor of
Seeking the truth.

Heresy fell
To the pits of hell.

For Frank

One hundred years ago
A lad from Hoboken broke
Upon the scene
And the world has not been the
Same since.

With only a skinny frame
Street smarts a set of pipes
And impeccable timing
He took the world
And a “gang of angels”
For a fantasy ride.

And what a ride it was:
From Chicago to New York
And all along the Strip
He redefined who we are
What is cool and what ain’t.

He took us to the moon
And way down lovers’ lane
He knew the difference
Between a broad a dame
A lady and a tramp
And he treated each with
Respect.
He loved them all.

He remade the American Songbook
And gave it to lovers
Still he did it his way.
And for those of us who ever felt
Heartache
Especially in the wee small hours
Of the morning—
That’s when we miss him
Most of all.