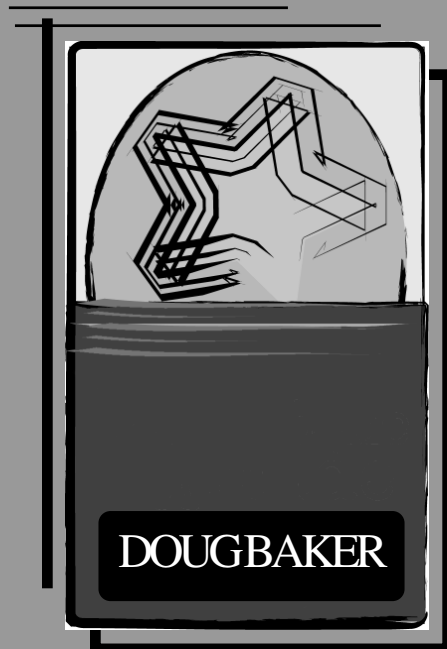


The  
HEADSTONE  
ARCADE

---



**The  
Headstone  
Arcade**

---

a poem

*Doug Baker*

The Entrenched Press

2002

The Headstone Arcade - Copyright © 2002 by Doug Baker.

All rights reserved. Published in the United States of America on a Macintosh Classic II. Inquiries should be addressed to The Entrenched Press, P.O. Box 127, Grantville, PA 17028.

The Entrenched Press logo is a trademark of The Entrenched Press.

Drawings by Evan Baker.

*For the holy rollers*

*"It's a great burden to be alive. A heavy burden, a great big heavy burden. I wish I were safe in heaven, dead."*

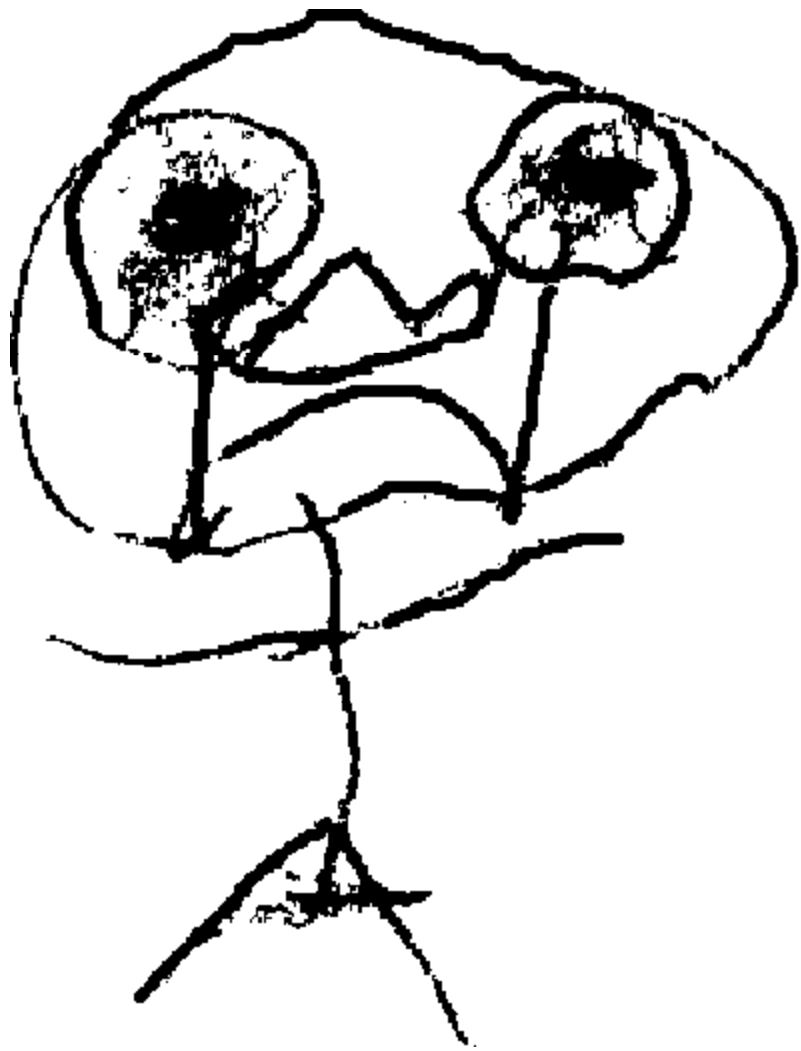
-Jack Kerouac

*"Leave the way of making you be what you really don't want to be"*

-Nick Drake

*"Precious in the light of the Lord is the death of his saints."*

-Psalm 116:15



# One

It seems that the expanse of life is  
such an innocent time  
(just like after waking)  
before the days conspired to exact their toll  
until only the soul  
remains for the taking

It has been there  
between the stacked sheets of everyday  
whispering to you  
when you try to shake it out anyway

it wants to reach out to you now  
take you by the collar to linger  
along side of all your moments  
that they can be seen now and forever

*for our sake  
may death be nimble  
may death be quick  
may death deliver us without a trick*

(for surely at every perceived ending  
get ready to kiss the rump of the next beginning)

...and surely in death it's all beginning again forever

When in life  
to be a confluence man - an actor  
a teller of tales  
a laugher at your jokes  
a weeper at your wedding  
to stand by you at your waking hour  
and breathe deep  
of your MOURNING BREATH

It offers you this:  
for whilst we wait for the binging pops of victory bell's  
from the striking ball against  
our own arcade stone  
we must rejoice in the chance  
to be part of the glorious game

Then to be alive  
is to live within the splendor of death  
to hear the strings again  
bouncing off the plank boards and  
trees bending in to listen  
to the beautiful megahurts  
pouring forth from the receiver  
in all of man

So the game goes on  
and the change of destiny drops another round  
on the glass for another chance  
to take a shot at someone's stone

The immortal man and woman  
drink of the water  
to keep themselves alive forever  
yet only time will demonstrate  
the awfulness of this

(Seeing: "Every inclination of  
man's heart is evil" -Genesis 8:21)

---

Most times we don't even know  
who in the hell we are  
and spend our days trying to  
solve this riddle

Like feeding ourselves picture shows  
and books and songs from the novel  
"How I Never Really Got Ahead  
Until I Picked Up a Gun"

and when we come across as  
wanderers - WONDERERS - sadder souls around us mull over  
and wonder if everything's alright  
"Everyone's concerned about you"  
comes the comment in a quiet moment  
when they have you in a corner  
when the asserter has their own problems  
fitting a few more femurs in the closet

...Dear Caring Friend: "Everyone should be concerned  
about you... oh, and make sure you don't monger  
away all of life's glorious curve"

... then plodding off - thinking

"I guess I was screwed  
from the start  
I was dumb  
I had a heart"

... as well as:

The one thing that  
is not like the others  
is the next thing we crave  
(as long as it be in line  
with the one that preceded)

and when the hype dies down  
will you be around  
will you make a sound  
to rouse me out

to push me to the verge  
to make me say  
"It IS such a beautiful day  
in this neighborhood  
the sun is out  
and I'm feeling good"

---

Monday (late afternoon)  
is in good shape  
(for the mile's it's seen)  
and the yawning echoes  
of the catering ambitious  
(when YES men aren't saying "yes"  
they are usually saying something stupid)

THAT ALL SOUNDS TOUGH  
(but let's face it -  
there's each day  
more of them and less of me)  
trying to drag me out of paper worlds  
(but I don't care  
if I ever get there)

...constantly out to occasions  
which I usually rise...

---

The tedious return from oblivion  
is at times a grueling one  
LIKE: the last time I broke the E  
key on this Royal was in 1996 after which  
I packed it up with the rest of the paper  
and told myself that I was going to LIVE  
and trotted off to join the others on the  
sidelines hoping to get rotation on the next play  
but (you know what happened then) the game  
got away from me and I ended up benched  
eventually and at some point stopped  
holding onto my helmet

So in a way there I was waiting  
to be sent into the game of life on  
terms formed by some commission or popular culture  
or some other do-gooder order but then  
it came to me slowly as though hearing the  
carnival cranking pump organ of the carousel  
from over the ridge to the glow of the setting sun  
(pulling me away from it all)

all the while time is mixed up in all this mess  
and I can tell you what happens to time when it  
is not appreciated for the vast opportunity  
that it is: those months speed away like clippers  
in a trade wind to the offing to form the Armada of  
Years...

“How they blow by us  
chuckling ignorantly with little  
knowledge (or care) of who we are...  
with a cackling missing-tooth  
Eee Hee Hee Haw laugh...”

Considering this: “In a given lifetime  
homo sapiens will cover a range that will  
span the world, visit the moon, or never leave the county”  
it is clear that the game has no meaning where it is  
played but of course rather that it was enjoyed

It is as simple as:  
“Ensure that you will be  
more than they will ever see”

---

...but I can tell  
when it is going wrong  
for every misdirected beat of my heart  
causes me to breath deep and reach for it there  
towards the center of the thing that for some  
reason has me continually burning the bridges  
behind me (all to often I know that I will  
never be going back)

---

but when it is right  
it is like sitting in a barn typing  
this poem with a few beers and cigarettes  
with a little Jean Sibelius  
from a transistor FM from my 3rd  
group house away long ago in the District  
and I am staring over a candle with the  
moths coming in from outside making their  
own confused stumbles in the night  
(trying to see the light?)

“...and I guess I’ll drink a little more  
to forget the problem I couldn’t do before  
and, my friend, I guess  
this is the only way  
to be done with the things  
they did to me today.”

For I too was reared in heaven  
and now I like you am dispensed  
an angel here to help (Don’t  
we all find ourselves adorned in our own  
regalia)

---

Soon after that  
he drunkenly slurred:  
“Never assume a current state  
is a permanent one”  
then told me that the headstone arcade  
is a mass repository of the ghost of things to come  
“like that book”  
when they finally chalk up our final score  
and burn it into some granite, but ironically  
in spite of all the sifting and singing we may do  
damn it all comes down to that last day that you

will ever see (and then maybe some flowers  
each year after that)

“but maybe not”

---

I know you may not even give a lick  
(I have been know to take one)  
and you maybe likely you didn't even get  
this far, but...

---

Something else: “I fully believe in  
independent thinking - for it makes agreements  
all the more satisfying.” ...'cause you know  
what I am saying like if everyone was running around  
thinking the same thing there'd be no discovery and all  
but when you spend your days hammering things over  
when another indy thinker pops up - yes then connect

---

Now for the night  
the keys slow (or more likely  
the wrong ones are hit with greater frequency)  
and friend bladder is asking for relief so  
for now I must go (or forever hold my pee)

There was time not too long ago  
that if it was out here in the barn  
doing this that old dog motor puppy  
would have been at my side

---

Strange  
(you would never know it)  
for I have given up career salary  
for wage and hours becoming smaller pay  
so I can leave the building  
like I did all of this week  
singing my song to myself  
whistling to myself  
“my job no stress  
when there my mind at rest”

I have probably had too many  
already to start typing these lines

but I don't really care and the royal  
again is bouncing backwards rear left  
from the impact of my longing rants  
and I haven't the faintest what to say next  
but it don't really matter for here now too  
my heart is anew with some rejoicing text

---

SO as I was saying earlier  
there was a day not so long ago  
that old friend Finney dog would have been with me  
but now he is gone from this scene and it is almost  
two years ago that I held his tired head in my hand  
and he knew he was breathing his last (what with him  
all having some blood anemia cancer thing - man I wish they  
would have truly diagnosed him, but after all he is  
only a dog) - but then again as my Dad would say -  
"He's smarter than most people I know - so anyway  
his blood would not carry the O2 any longer so I  
was there after they had connected him to the trickle drip  
and Deanna and Evan had left the room and then they said  
'whenever you're ready' and I eventually said 'ready' and  
the pink paste  
entered his front leg and how heavy his  
head became in my arms and never in the eleven years that  
I'd known him was he ever tired enough that I had to hold  
the whole weight of his glorious noggin in mine -  
how it was heavy and how repugnant the moment that I had  
to lay it forever back onto the table (for dammit  
my glasses were all splashed up from my vain attempts  
to suppress the tears that wanted to splay all about the  
walls of the vet office and the inner most strongholds of  
my blustery heart). Farewell friend Finney like all those  
folks expect to see their pets in the next life - I  
relish the moment when I tackle you next...

(God dog you know I am sorry and forever lament the times  
that you pissed me off - or rather I got pissed of at you -  
ever so unjustly and did terrible things like curse and  
kick  
and do you know what? You never wavered and perpetually  
would come running at the chaotic beckoning of my whistle  
for you never knew what was waiting for you  
on the other side of it)

(and I know  
all the folks  
with the afghans and kleenex  
in the rear window

will think the same of their cats)  
but dogs are people  
well some like the one  
Rob and I saw yesterday  
hanging his head out  
the window made me think  
of old Finn's head  
heavy in my hands

---

Well anyway  
you know that each night on my way home now  
I thank God for the place that he has guided me to  
(so it goes without saying in those tougher moments  
that I should have been doing that all along)

---

Funny thing is this: when on the Royal and the passion  
swells up in your chest your darn fingers are guided right  
onto  
the exactly correct keys in a tempo that could almost chime  
from a keyboard without any error whatsoever ('course thing  
is  
with typewriter all the words you pound out will forever  
fall  
on the floor of the hall like some cheap flyer underfoot)

---

So you know that the breast-pocket notebook says  
(positioned over the classic placement of the heart)  
next:

Such a wicked game ask not how  
you will meet death but  
how will you meet the next day  
(of course wherein may surely dwell  
your maker)

---

Sometimes I get on the interstate and  
breathe into the micro-cassette recorder  
crazy thoughts of yesterdee like-

*You seem so tiny  
and frail but  
you're a dozer in the field*

*of my sentimentalities*

*I went after you  
for your slender curves and  
sultry looks but  
now it is all I can do  
to stand on my feet  
as you move the  
earth beneath my feet*

*So now my girl is  
like a dozer  
and every time that  
I come over we  
sit for hours and  
I'm of course just hoping  
for a kiss*

*and even waiting  
'til the sun doth rise  
I usually leave  
puckering another miss*

*I guess I was the fool  
to think  
that I was the one on top  
the way you threw  
your dust all  
over me keeps  
me coming back and  
I can never stop*

*and I don't know  
where you got it  
or even what it is  
but it keeps me coming  
over to lay prostrate  
in the path of your razing*

*Now I lay here in  
your earth listening  
to the distant purr  
of your dozer  
rolling off  
to destroy another*

*and every now and then  
I rise from my tomb  
to drive in my car to peer  
at the light of your once-room*

*to wonder what you're up to  
and wonder which  
piece of earth  
you next plan to move*

---

(Damn, just stepped out  
to take a riss and somehow the  
ever-persistent moths had slipped in  
to visit the dangling 40 watt bulb  
over my table - but that's okay  
for I have them, the smell of barn wood  
and aged mouse piss to keep me  
further company)

---

Then one other time on the road goes:

(but first -  
poets are tough  
they keep dragging you through  
the scruff  
provided you can hold on  
long enough)

Where goes time  
behind me  
it all returns  
to find me

Now I'm  
up in the clouds  
rushing towards you  
through a fog of shrouds

Buk' used  
the swaying symphonies  
to guide his pock-marked heart  
- a black diamond confused for coal -  
I now employ them  
to restart the art

For what I mean is  
now the days  
find me olded  
looking through  
grey eyes still glinting mere  
23 years bold

and in those times  
when I feel I'll never see  
my soul again  
I turn off the interstate  
to breeze fill my hair  
with the dusty winds  
of daisy lane

God makes us  
God makes us  
God damn, you are thoughtful  
or just another thought fool  
like me I mean  
are you looking for  
a mantra  
or just a new Elantra?

(Stir it up  
with a listening to Henryk Gorecki  
symphony no. 3  
for surely that will blow the  
lichens off the soul as surely as  
any sand blast-o)

Like: Tire tread  
and tree rings though  
are quite different  
but circular things

---

Now surely I and the poem  
are getting ripped but none of that matters  
while the transistor radio continues to endlessly pound out  
the chords that reach out and in their fading waves  
thump my bleating heart for you know what I mean  
about music being the most important thing  
that will ever get you close on earth  
to seemingly supreme being

but you also know that the sun  
begrudgingly (or not) will rise again tomorrow  
whether you here (or not) and I guess that is why  
you should gulp it down like honey on the gullet at  
2:30 in the morning cause you're sure it will def  
help with 'morrow's headache

but it really didn't  
though it delivered that sweet bright hope

which dangled the carrot around the next corner  
and there you went after it after all  
and sometimes during other days  
with the way things go I don't know why  
the flags even make it past half-mast  
(I guess that's where the honey helps)

---

The damsel in distress  
has seen nothing of the burning itch  
of my YEAST INFLECTION and the terrible shirt  
that I must don that cries out  
(no matter what the fashion) KICK ME  
for I love your disparaging embraces

---

For I love you old friends and brother  
for what we had (maybe not so much of what we have now  
but that's okay - anything can be rebuilt) and  
for what we may have tomorrow - I know you know  
THAT I KNOW (it surely will be amazing)

and if I was going to start a novel  
on each of our tremendous relationships  
I would start each of them

Before we were  
all blown out of each other's lives...  
THIS HAPPENED and filled another  
void between the next falling glorious slice of  
american cheese

---

I was almost ready to be done with this  
( 'cause when you are tanked like this  
the keys go nowhere slow) but again with the fire thing  
anything might burn  
we everyday might be on fire and I think that  
for surely we are, but also our stuff  
and you have to keep it safe or better  
give it all up forever (for that is what  
eventually happens) and then of course rather than  
lowering us into tasty ground we may have  
bequeathed that they should finally slide us  
into the hottest oven to send up into sky  
or some other towering spot ... (OF COURSE  
just please remember what you have to do before the

moment when the game displays your final score -

HOW CAN I BE SO MOVED  
WITH NOWHERE TO GO?

give life meaning - smile all the while

-Singed, Boris

P.S. I want to write stuff not fluff

---

It was as if at some random point  
almost against our wills  
we all wondered into the currents  
of life in search of our engaging games  
when it seemed likely better  
to stick around basking in each other  
then surely enough one day  
one of us didn't show up at the corner  
and it went that way real quick  
until it was just one holding  
the largest memories

So where are all those people  
with whom I had the life thing fling?  
Sadly - One is dead - when Greg Barzczowski played  
his last round one the business end  
of a 30-06 some late night after the family  
had been put to bed and it doesn't seem all that long  
ago that he and I were out back in the alfalfa field  
behind our house overlooking one of the most beautiful  
views  
that he or I would ever see (and I only realize how beauti-  
ful  
it was now - I only hope he did as well) sometime after  
the Fourth of July - and we ended  
up throwing scribes at one another as the sun set -  
one even going off in my hand and he yelled "Did it hurt?!"  
"Yes!" I yelled back, but kept launching them laughing.  
That  
was a good day - maybe Greg stopped having them. But  
DAMN he was full of such cheer... I don't understand it.  
Things change - so I guess you gotta keep lapping at the  
honey,  
eh?

I surely miss him  
and I wish that I could have been back there in a second

to launch another scrib offensive his way  
for the fight will keep you indefinitely alive -

On, then, another summer night near sunset  
we sat in that same alfalfa field looking towards the Pul-  
pit  
ridge off in the distance reflective like  
- one of the few times - to the scene of sunsetted  
green mountains fighting back the dying orange glow  
talking about stuff and who we'd be and we both vowed  
that neither of us would ever do drugs, but I guess that  
stuff  
only lasts so long - at least we tried - but within two  
years  
he was into that stuff at school and though I remained  
clean  
longer it got me in the end as well. But not before we  
drifted apart  
and going different ways and I guess it never occurred to  
me  
at the time that that one particular night would be the  
last  
time that we ever did make promises in the alfalfa field  
in the shadow of the Pulpit.

So when my Mom sent me the  
local paper from the town that he  
never moved away from I held it a bit and  
stared at his photographer-moment happy face  
and I guess that I figured all those happy  
souls with whom I giggled for what was really now  
just a couple of days would surely be happy with  
what they were getting into to... Whatever Greg got into  
it was not making him happy and he ran out of  
places and fields to think it out...

...more likely he couldn't even begin to think  
of where to begin to look.  
The places he envisioned  
only could be in heaven...

---

All my gone friends  
all that we have now is the mutually divided  
moment that ever is passing and can present us  
with anything and may take it all away  
I say now that I thank you for that glorious  
time and the little bit of you that I have packed  
into the most precious chambers of my mind from

which to draw inspiration to get me through those  
sadder scenes

To those of you that i have lost contact with  
- the Doug Cherry's and Tommy Morehead's - and all the  
others like Bruce Moore, Jimmy Corle, Joe Hoover, Rob Har-  
ris,  
Darren Brumbaugh, Stacey Raugh, Michelle Hall, Amy Acker,  
Lori Honsacker, Dori Hoover, Leslie Hudson, Lori Appleman,  
John Czapko, John Rex, Brian Jones, John Dehner, Simon-  
Peter Gomez,  
Albert Bosch, Liz, John, John Melvin, Dowd Walker, Graham  
Hunter, Sherry Steeley, Lisa Barber, Ann Richards, Kirt  
Barker,  
Steve Tinker, Dwight Stonerook, Jodi Hover, and first kiss  
out in the toolshed Leah Johnson... but this list requires  
more forever than I will ever have so -

then a tipped hat to everything that I ever loved  
now is all scattered fragmented and splintered  
like a serving dish across the floor  
and there I am stooped over  
trying to piece together the shards  
into some semblance of whole  
with my crazy glue

I guess that is what love is though -  
trying to hold onto something or appreciate  
something from afar that you really want  
to have to yourself

{like love is recollection:  
*for something never recalled  
never occurred after all}*

---

and awh it seems  
all of our activities of late  
have us running around declaring  
that the heaven's FOR BID  
jumping one rock to the next

like:  
THE RIG bearing down on me  
reminding me of this divested creation

How many hours of listening to salvation  
debate talk shows off the a.m. did it take? Whatever  
it takes my friend then

you should do it

Then the word started  
seeping in again  
like the calvary coming to town

*that's when  
life gets nice  
like you know it should  
and I get fucked up  
when the beer tastes good*

but surely I ain't no one special  
and probably less than a good example  
and at times go through my days consuming the  
things that are mailed and in-boxed to me  
buying into it like a dog wolfing down the tainted burger  
but then it was funny just this past week  
at church (when I listen I always get something cool  
out of it - like for instance the whole Word of God thing)  
but I was digging on this thing in the pre-printed  
MASS-distributed bulletin and my eyes took to  
the listed psalm and if you ever get a spare chance  
that you're going to throw away anyway then check out  
Psalm 49 for a good snibbet about the way all this material  
is figment and frivolity and sand castles BOUND TO BE  
flat beach next morn

and it purely echoes the great line in Psalm 33:17 the way  
it says 'a horse is a vain hope for salvation; despite  
all its strength it cannot save' which really just  
gets down to the fact that we really can accumulate all  
or none of the comfort, but it will never avoid Psalm 49:14  
the way it lays into you with '...like sheep they are laid  
in the grave: death shall feed on them; and the upright  
shall  
have dominion over them in the morning and their beauty  
shall  
be consumed in the grave far from their princely dwellings'

and surely you know by know  
that I know very little  
about all this but something has stirred  
in me and caused the bum who cowered outside  
the church for years to eventually don the  
cleanest rags and try some kind of dialogue with  
the savior

for what is clear to me  
is that this world is

no more gonna last forever than  
your first fort did; as it all comes down eventually  
(but that is the thing about old world is that it will  
outlast all of us and maybe that reality is  
what should be realized is that we won't last forever here  
but if not here then where - you know what I submit  
it is that until we join eternity then we are here to live  
this crooked life and swat against the suffering  
with our broadest darwinian smiles (use it or lose it)  
and then land in the grave like in your bed after one of  
the  
best days you ever had and so that your headstone seems  
a head rest from which you will rise the next day hey:

Rest in peace  
BEAUTIFUL YOU

So remember the joy and  
every now and then thin back over what  
was and recall what the face of joy was to you  
like the memories of my distant  
days gone are forced  
into smaller and smaller  
allocations of my HEAD DRIVE

but one thing I do recall is  
being on an inner tube with  
Mike Lingenfelter towed behind fast  
enough boat to have us trying to hold on  
with all our might and all we could do was look at each  
other  
and laugh harder and harder and you know the more  
you do that the weaker the fingers become  
until one then both of us skidded into the  
lake water

So when you recall  
try to remember it all  
only to discover  
that everything that has ever been loved  
is all fragmented and splintered  
and still moving across the floor  
and there still stooped over  
are all of us  
trying to piece together what was  
into some semblance of a whole  
with more of our CRAZY glue

I MEAN IT IS LIKE SAYING

{NO}

IN A BARN FULL OF CHICKENS FLYING AROUND

Still,  
remain unflappable  
for you are the continuation  
you live off the land  
like a wild man

bundle all your plans  
and put them in a vile  
then shake them shake them  
shake them all the while

(watch it fizz)

like when  
I lay on my back  
laughing back at the sky  
for a moment I find happiness  
just before the dogs all rush in  
licking the smile off my face

(somehow sensing my LOCO MOTIVES)

SO  
Dear God  
let me keep  
my idle vices  
in a sack under my bed  
pulling them out only  
when I need a night with the odalisque  
to get me through this world

Dear God  
let me be frank  
let me be pure  
let me go behind the planks  
and wack out some more of the yore

Let me send out  
these words jamming  
the streaming cell phone transmissions  
so thick the birds and planes  
can't even make it back to the choking world

---

So let me thank

that dead rat Evan discovered  
when we were kicking the soccer ball  
in the clouding August afternoon  
when he said 'Daddy what's that' and I  
walked over to see the dead rotting rodent from  
inside due to the d-con bounty I had left for him there  
for the mice to feed and I quickly noticed the  
hole in its throat and head chewed open  
and it must have run around like that and finally came to  
rest its exposed skull on the cinder blocks outside the  
barn

For the rats last laugh  
had me running around then  
the rest of the afternoon cleaning out the barn  
and dumping the rat attracting items like  
the blankets and rolled-up carpets and the  
things that were doing no service to anyone  
anyway and while I was at it I got the  
writing desk more situated and ready  
and defended against the rodents  
(I mean why should that rat be able to  
do us all a favor and eats this poem up  
and sleep and piss on it and push it  
out to its utilitarian end)

*a writer first  
a writer last  
a writer always  
stuck in the past?*

drag me out to the city  
take me to bad shows  
make me meet your family  
let me wear my shoes  
in your house

I mean the deal is  
only as big as you make it

for if I said  
I did nothing wrong  
surely don't think for a second  
that I did everything right

for when  
I am with you  
we cheer the breaking of dawn  
(the very same dawn that will send us  
back home in different directions

challenging us to keep it all together -  
but beer is runny mortar so ...)

8/18/01

---

It just seems then  
old world (and everTHING in it) has turned a corner  
and seems heading brakeless down a dark alley  
not to see the other side  
for the fog of anger

and it will lift  
or we will fall  
throttling each other while our eyes  
search for the point of it all

for it is greed and it is love  
one in the same from either side of the book  
and maybe this is saying something  
or it is all just....

Just another foggy notion  
soaring at me from over the ocean

---

Why not?  
I can think of a thousand  
reason not to  
but none of them are very compelling

*these are the things  
racing around inside  
dying to be left out*

---

Still these days  
when I pull up at the gas station  
and get out of the car  
to the smell of pumping gas  
and the noise of the engines  
starting and stopping doors slamming  
the beating feet of the travelers  
passing through...  
reminds me of the days  
at Breezewood Gulf  
working hot summers on the pavement

all day exchanging cash for gas  
I used to think and wonder  
where the travelers were going  
today it's the same  
and I still wonder where the road may go  
or other adventures ensue  
every time I turn off of it

Like on  
sunny interstate  
driving by  
her car the hair seemed to invite me along  
but upon fly by and subtle glance her way  
my head shot quickly back to the matter  
of steering the car as I saw  
her (or surely a him) leering buck teeth grin back at me  
so I guess that goes to show you  
all this home-goer daydreaming  
can take you too far away from reality  
and too close to Woody Woodpecker's  
veiled love interest and all those  
others whose faces can't be helped

---

But before too long  
later that day  
later than morning  
life is too glorious  
to spend the rest of it  
in a back-breaking endeavor  
hunched over  
the sand-in-eye machine

You know  
it is true like when  
we are swinging at hate confounded  
like trying to drop the whizzing mosquito  
only to hit our own head

*Love is there all around  
ABOUNDING AND RAMPANT  
waiting to be scooped up*

It is everywhere  
it is around us  
but there are still spaces to occupy  
for love wants to rush in  
like water  
to overtake the most stubborn vacuum

and of course then  
we must drill holes in the  
deepest baffled chambers of the hating heart  
(to help it along -  
wielding POWER TOOLS)

Once there it sets  
like a good portland cement  
hard to beat apart and quick to offer itself  
up for service like when Joe stops by  
and all the hours days  
that have gone by  
are compressed accordion style  
to their thinnest point  
as though the separation never occurred  
and we pick up where we left off  
on the journey  
on the road  
to joy

No our time  
is most often spent  
standing outside the barn  
walking around sharing where we been  
kicking stones  
picking berries  
he holding my daughter  
in his arms  
my son crawling up our arms  
begging us to push him on the swing  
he ABSOLUTELY heedless  
of the times Joe and I shared  
as though clamoring for new ones  
little champion of a new day  
little at first  
eventually to overtake  
my highest noon

---

*I guess for the most part  
this is me knowing nothing  
just a bunch of hunches  
hunching out loud*

---

Apart from that  
then it seems that man  
always wants to run feverishly

between the misery and the evil  
forsaking the smiling statue of love  
and the only thing saving us  
is Christ's message  
and his BENEVOLENT TRACTOR BEAM  
always trying to pull us gently  
to dock when all this struggle  
suddenly seems as simple  
as low sci-fi

---

*You lowest man  
you were the ripest berry  
plucked from the very top  
of the butt hedge*

---

And you may be glorious  
in terms of your overflowing coffers  
(but don't you know  
that we already know  
that you are  
SUPER SUCCESSFUL)

---

*These times claim to never hear  
the violins reach crescendo  
but they are here now  
that's all I know*

---

Still it makes me wonder  
what became of the others who  
heard them with me before  
and the other wondering characters  
from the beloved cast of life  
who showed me things  
RIGHT OR WRONG  
(wrong not necessarily being bad)  
where we all went  
I do not know  
(nobody ever left  
they just went that way)

---

*Now pick up the needle  
and drop it onto Jenny  
who calls forth like  
ACHING ECHO out of  
Sweet Thursday*

---

and now  
with God leading the movements  
leaping of tall buildings  
is done in stride

and all these technologies  
and magic tricks  
and things making our lives easier  
are just the slight of hand  
turning around to slap the  
HOPEFUL FACE OF MAN

---

*Well  
(probably not so much  
THOUGHT PROVOKING  
as provoking - I know)*

---

It  
has using kicking the dirt  
and looking at the sky  
and running into one another  
both gleeful and sad  
lucid and confused  
ALL BY HAPPY STANCE  
as we await our final hour  
through the seemingly endless  
BOMBARDING MOMENTS  
and what is done  
before we catch the last

---

*and I am probably  
pretentious enough to believe  
that I have shed all  
pretensions*

---

While my heart  
has been jack-slapped enough  
after having felt so compelled  
and the tremendous feeling  
of having to follow  
the MAJORITY RULES

So much of this then  
becomes us trying to work things out  
while we play the game  
of DEATH AND DYING  
it's dying to live  
it's beyond the urge  
to feel such amazing grace

like when you catch them saying  
"You need to buy in on this -  
and stop trying to renegotiate the terms  
of your lease on life!"

but dance along  
still anyway anyhow mumbling  
"I'm in love with alot of people  
I'm in love with everyone"

---

*Good lard in heaven  
I guess wherever love may take us  
we are bound to follow*

---

These days,  
despite my murderous attempts  
to cease the jay's caw caw cacophonying  
they continue to gaggle on in my ear  
and I kick and strike out  
and yell "Awh come on Steve,  
let's get back to the way  
things used to be!"

But not possible  
to accomplish the chunk restart  
on this globe of lovely junk drawer  
where there's so much more  
than what's floating at the surface

{There are tears on a sunny day

there are clowns at the circus}

---

Way to be?

I mean it is like this:  
Let's face it  
if someone gives you the finger  
give them the thumbs up  
'sif to say  
"Yes man - hey, you want to fuck me!"

Or then again  
how are you when you are alone  
what are they gonna catch  
on the hidden tell-all tape  
with they be documenting  
your secret rage  
your secret hate  
what will God have you doing  
on your video tape?

(Is all this something  
or am I just the whining voice of  
from a skipped generation  
flailing like bubble bursts  
against, amidst this world of hurt

well, maybe then again  
there are some tasty sips  
stuck in the whine)

OR

there surely are always  
some savory drips  
caught in the whine)

BUT if I could carry all this  
upon my shoulder  
it would likely be  
a vomitus child  
spattering, sputtering  
GO FOLKS HOME  
GO FOLKS HOME!

---

Truth be told

I don't much like staying anywhere  
long enough  
where I get too large a whiff  
of the stink of destiny  
and all their stinking brothers  
of tomorrow lined up waiting  
to be strung on the line  
of the EVERYDAY

---

(It's not so good as a song  
It's not so good as a poem  
so throw it all away  
and write another one

auntie way,  
and after all  
the most important thing  
en la world  
is the MUSIC  
not this bit of scrit)

---

"and that the image is  
in the interview he said  
none of us do drugs  
but when we did  
we only did enough drugs  
-and I won't name any names-  
to get the requisite artistic edge on"

LIKE when I started drinking  
that first summer out of high school  
and she wondering what else I was getting  
into in college (like sucking on  
Brian Jones' chicken foot bowl in his  
dorm room he shared with Bob-o) ooh-wee  
and soon after that she went away for  
good - well almost - (I didn't think it  
was good at the time) after she visited  
seeing too much of my eroding scene  
and I guess that's okay though she  
got away with a chunk of my heart  
for better or for good.

*and now  
I don't care  
who she loves*

*I only care  
that she does*

*for if ever  
there was a  
Holly Golightly  
thrumming the strings  
of my heart  
like some girl's play things  
it dwas 'er*

*and I am content  
to beat around  
playing second best  
to the first  
and the last*

---

While the Nineties  
were a rocky road  
at a hundred and five  
the movement felt good  
but we landed a big case  
of bulbous clustering 'roids

---

Still  
it's somewhat a small feeling of let down  
like walking away from the CD player  
after listening to  
Shiny Happy People  
and not feeling  
quite *that* happy

(but being the  
middle child  
I could get along  
with a rattle snake  
in a sleeping bag)

But this ain't to say  
that I tromp around all the time  
inside my own head  
like what's going on over there in the middle east  
boils in my chest - oh mother whatever  
and so I was discussing this with my bro at work  
and I said what they needed was some kind of benevolent  
dictator to straighten it all out - some Machiavellian

crack down - but then he said that the two sides then would  
probably band together against this new common foe  
but I said no probably not for the sides will likely  
be throwing stones at each other even as the juggernaut  
of armageddon rolls over them - never to realize  
that he who laughs last laughs like an ass. 8/15/01

and I can be convinced  
always that beauty is the only  
thing that zips around here unaccounted for  
and surely under-appreciated like when she  
went sailing by on the highway  
catching thy commuting eye  
as it watched and separated at the split  
we heading north  
she disappearing behind  
the RESTRAINING WALL

So in a way  
my quivering gas gauge  
has become my life's wage  
too often running on fumes

Like driving all the time  
and GOING NOWHERE over same road  
all they time and hear me brother  
I wish my miles would lead to you and you and you  
so we could talk together like before  
but brother it's okay  
I know you can't confide in me like you used to  
for we're not as close as we used to be  
for some the distance is too far but that's okay  
for others the distance never draws together and  
eventually one of them hears a distant goodbye  
barely blip in their ear  
BUT that's not to say or speak of tomorrow  
there's no sense worrying about it  
for that's just the way  
THE UNIVERSE UNRAVELS  
it has a way of just working out  
*it has a way of just working US out*

I mean you never know what  
is just about to happen  
like the way - from shit  
can come something  
even if it's just flies  
(I mean you CAN polish a turd  
or maybe just paint it WHITE)

---

You know it's funny sometimes  
in this disjointed day  
and maybe sometimes you should  
give it a try  
and just wave at some stranger someday  
for no apparent reason than just to say hi  
and funny thing is  
usually you'll catch a wave back  
and maybe even an eye  
that will want to say  
GOOD BYE

even though  
this big land  
doesn't always like  
what is good  
and we always scramble out to buy  
what it  
thinks we should

like  
*What man?* Another song about California?  
Come on!  
when you gonna write  
one about (or after)  
my frakish longing lizard heart  
when are you gonna get  
inside me?

Do you really think  
that we REALLY want  
compartmentalized music  
OR some chords that are going  
to for even that smallest duration  
get us out of our boxes

*Tell me what's going on in you  
and I may just match it up with  
something in me that's true*

and for sure  
what we wish for  
is usually there  
beside the other things we forgot  
and when we find them  
how our ASSES CLAP!  
a mexican dance  
several timesover

at the breaking news  
of that

even though now  
in this day  
with all the fires and flooding  
and earthquakes and cloning  
I say BRING IT ON  
zaz it's all contributing  
to the next hand  
of the end game

*(sometimes the fires  
destroy things  
whose times have come)*

Still,  
my enthusiasm  
for the end of the world remains  
the headless unicorn of yesterday  
lost and wandering the wood  
for the leading part

---

I need that energy  
and I need that drive  
and I need to run into it  
like Lambert flashing a broken smile

and surely ziam objective  
up to the point where my brain meets  
the walls of my skull

Sometimes it may seem  
a horrible tragicomedy  
but stop and realize that likely  
God is smiling with me  
and not at me

*(God ain't dour  
he bloomed the flower)*

---

Remember  
it's a beautiful world  
when everybody's into something  
and I am into that lonely endeavor  
of banging keys and looking at

empty paper

All the while  
the queen has me in check and life  
be like a broken sewage line  
rushing all over and through me  
while I keep pushing and working  
still trying to get to  
Abingdon

and try as I might  
it is also a struggle to try to fight  
the urge to spend most of the day  
SITTING POINTING CLICKING  
searching for the next big HYPERLINK  
but the thing that willenrich  
just won't fit at that resolution

---

So what may come  
invariably - there is still this stuff  
training all the way through my cranium  
that gets me moving  
ALL THE WAY TO ALEXANDRIA  
to see them sit and play  
and they made us  
think back on  
the better part of the day

They've seen the bliss  
tapping at the window  
making us reconsider  
the better part of this

Only to lead us  
to the fire ring  
where we will gather  
amongst the mountains  
sit back and have asip  
of the barley whine  
(never even)  
BARELY WHINE

when telling our  
poignant tales of woe  
when life's flowing  
around us like rocks?  
smiling to the sky  
and it's been long

that the world heard  
the unison laughs

(Do you remember?

how the maples danced?)

---

Oh happ-less  
I don't know  
why you start  
what you start  
so just quit trying  
to break my heart

for I don't even know  
what the guy beside me  
is trying to kill  
I can only tell  
that I am a purveyor  
of the goodwill

I mean  
there's probably every reason  
to think  
that I sitting in my hole  
SINK

(but never to start  
getting worried 'bout shit-  
'cause I know it is all  
on the verge of a glorious  
RESTART)

[LISTEN - TO WHAT  
I HAVE TO SAY  
SING  
WHAT YOUR SOUL BETRAYS  
TAP  
WHAT YOUR BOOT  
RELAYS]

---

So,  
forever to date  
putting off and forestalling  
THE BIG WHIG OUT  
and searching and crying out for the glory

inspires me to  
look up - LOOK UP

[REMEMBER on the starry nights  
when it all reminds you of GOD  
it is just that - nature - pointing  
to GOD - but it is not  
the hidden hero he]

Then  
who's your  
designated hated  
where beat you off each day  
to kill off the rushes of dread coming your way?  
Are you drunk on calm seas under that streaming sun  
(eh sun! did anything ever die a more spectacular death?)  
or are you up against his northeaster  
with Cap'n Crunches crew?

Must you endure the bad breaths of the  
same old characters each day?  
or are you blessed to rejoice in the  
flowered presence of beauty  
making you look up from endeavor to ask  
"Where are you from?"  
and she answers in her own good time  
betwixt the draws on the cigarette -  
"Bliss"

---

Tonight  
I'm heading out on the town  
'cause frankly I'm tired of  
drinking alone  
talking across bar stools with haggards  
on the flight at the end of  
their life

That is to say  
I mean  
if you could find  
the right rift  
to bring us together  
it might make  
all the canyons  
seem like cracks  
in the sidewalks  
on the way home  
from school

[and I used to know  
where the roots  
were going to shoot up next  
up through the ground  
and I would be standing  
waiting to pluck them  
like ripened dandelions  
such DANDY LIONS]

---

*They  
like me  
we've got to get the guys  
off the candy  
and pull the suckers from the  
children's mouths  
and keep them away from the pitfalls  
and the same things that turned  
you into a pussy*

But anymore it seems  
this is all the more unlikely  
and me and my friends  
are like fragments  
from a BIG gang BANG  
outwardly moving  
away and out  
and to keep in touch anymore  
have to be rather adept  
ASTRO NAUGHTS

(So whisper to me  
when I am on the verge of sleepy  
sing to me some more  
tales of woe  
and a couple more songs  
of sorrow

Bring forth the dreams  
that see your face turned upwards  
to the sky  
snowflakes gathering on  
LASHES  
above your eye)

I say then to you  
all you other  
ASBESTOS ANGELS

also dwelling kicking around in the  
yoŭ yeſ of hey

*So if you couldn't tell already:  
so much of my life  
goes back to my friends  
and if you think this is a bad poem  
be sure to warn yours*

---

So caught  
in God's tundra world  
does it really have to fall  
from the tongue of a yeti  
for it to be worthwhile?

Don't you ever feel  
when the day wakes  
that God breaks  
another great day  
on the rim of his pan  
and its glory  
splatters across the span  
of your waking eye?

I'd say so  
and it whisks your soul away  
like a cat  
licking up your baby's  
last breath

but fuck  
I don't have all the answers  
EVEN WAY MORE LIKELY  
-not a damned one-  
barely enough to fill up one frail shard  
and sometimes when I am not so duly dutiful  
I break from my routine  
and peer in the rear-view mirror

see Christ bearing down on me - FULL TILT  
like a great rig of Godly reminder  
nudging me back on the road

he whispers to me  
**maybe sometimes those things  
you hate doing  
after they're behind you  
and you look back over your shoulder you realize**

**that they were just what you needed**  
**ALL ALONG**

and it was on that night  
after driving several hundred miles  
alone in early May night  
in finally came to me around Clarion  
on desolate way to Erie  
I got the spark and lines started coming again  
was it the time alone  
was it the feeling of miles or minutes  
was it the oddity of being moved along lonely PA stretch  
EYES DON'T KNOW  
I don't know (10/1/01)

In times like those  
old thoughts awake again  
make themselves heard  
and in my travels  
I can be guilty  
of slipping into distant pasts  
to visit gone joys  
and I wish I could re-visit  
any number of those prancing beauties  
all nubile and encased in Jordache  
who once made the walk between classes  
so lovely

---

So banged a long one here  
and ain't fucking done as yet  
and it has gone on and on and the  
summer half-started when begun  
now very definitely over so  
nights are cooler and the leaves are  
considering a change

I had to reach in deep  
to pull this one out  
enlisting the plumbing of my heart  
to snake out the diamond of joy  
lodged clogged in the inner recesses  
IN A CHAMBER  
sat vapid too long

I mean it is no breakTHROUGH  
and surely is no breakFAST  
with Kerouac and Christ  
but surely somewhats holder of some meaning

than the recent placard bumper sticker  
of the random alley bastard dat said  
HORN BROKEN WATCH FOR FINGER  
or of course the PISSING CALVINS  
(though you have to admit the horn broken  
watch for finger one does crack you up -  
but remember if so signaled, reply with  
good old fashioned thumbs up)

---

On the 'morrow  
in the marrow  
you will feel it  
coming on like an uncontrollable giggle  
and you will be asking yourself how can I be laughing NOW  
and I can only offer that comedy  
is the only thing  
that is gonna gets us through  
the END OF THE WORLD  
and to the next

*the thing that smells  
like glory  
is really  
someone else's glue  
so drop the covers  
and get some fresh air  
into you*

Like the BIG-ASS WRECKING BALL  
(of our future  
-our tomorrow)  
is a huge  
soured fruit  
looking to grudge  
or be grudged

Does it mean  
we are blips  
on the radar  
or farts in the church?

BLIP BLIP RIP

R. I. P.

So journey  
to the center  
of the mirth

and don't worry  
- we have a lifetime  
to screw it up  
and finely slice  
all the crap

*You experimented  
but they employed  
to the sound of army GIDEON  
rising from the void*

---

So now today  
when it is all moving too fast  
Eyes seem so stuck in SLOW MOJO  
and all the while  
are you keeping time?  
(and refusing to share)  
are you stock-housing your gifts  
while my little boy  
runs around this town  
being the needle and thread  
pulling it all  
back together

(like a little  
stitch in time)

Still  
all this drama of today  
makes me a little weary and  
kind of makes me want to sling the pack  
on the back and off to Old Rag  
(whatever I did those 10 - 12 years ago  
left on me...

-indelible mark -

banded that day  
and for all my future movements  
and migrations)

but, I guess  
all this evil will end when  
all the horrible hydra heads  
are singing out of the same charred hymnal  
as they trip and kick over themselves  
in their fervent worship of God  
FOR WE ARE MAN

forever proud and opinionated  
but never truly will quite GET IT

So sink comfortably into  
the degenerating world  
and when I was young I used to ask  
of the stars "How far can they be?"  
but now the stars  
seem so far away from me

Maybe perchance I only saw  
the bugs dancing over the meadow  
LIGHTNING BUGS or FIREFLIES  
(are the same difference  
but I don't know why)

Maybe simpler questions  
really need answered  
like whatever happened to Bubbs Daddy  
or the cinnamon toothpicks that had me  
riding my bike for miles  
to the Majik Markit  
(of course also picking up  
packs of baseball cards still chewing  
the mini plywood pink slabs as it  
cut into the roof of my mouth SEARCHING  
for a couple more members of the 1979 Pirates  
- "All I need yet is Dave Parker")

---

The thing  
that's wrong with him  
is the thing feeding  
what's wrong with you  
and so you must lose  
the repugnant love of self  
and replace it with  
under the tree  
respect merely of self

---

*Say you're not the hoodwink  
lingering on the corner  
for something to happen  
ready to catch forever the  
BIG FORLORN FRISBEE  
one day to sadly finally realize  
the body is a bag*

*when left of life  
it wants to rot*

and for all time  
I will always revel in  
the times we had together  
and when you're gone  
or me as well  
let's promise to visit  
each other's stones

---

but I hang on infinitely too  
and I never know when to leave  
THE NEXT BIG BEER EVENT  
all I know is  
I end up wishing the game  
would have lasted all day

(it all ends up  
dropping me off  
STRANDED  
without a ride home  
from the  
headstone arcade)

Like just recently  
when I was out back of Jim's house  
on the patio looking up at the stars  
but talking of things of gravity and the  
things that hold us to the earth and make  
us miss the times in between when we  
will next see David fall asleep too early  
on the couch and I will also lament a little bit  
that we never did get to scrap that night  
or any other for my ribs are weakened by it all  
BY ALL THE WEEKENDS  
So Jim and I talk about stuff so familiar  
that it seems we are dialoguing with our  
own persons and I say to Jim: "How's the yard?"  
and he says back: "Fine. How's the moon?"  
"Same as ever I guess. Lovely as ever."

*Falling from the sky  
through 100 foot trees  
and boughs are breaking  
they can't even stop me*

So onward

---

Now it nears  
it is time that I go  
for my discontent save my joy  
is casting a larger shadow

but before that  
thanks be to the band  
for when I hear them sing  
I think of gone sunny summer days  
waking up hungover again  
in the District

(Like the time that Johnny Mel  
and I got baked in his backyard down there  
-it didn't take long for me - about the time  
that it takes to fill a glass of water -  
but even more after he walked away leaving the  
SMOLDERING BOWL so I snatched it up  
and began thinking of Koerber the way he used to say  
"You can't pass out from the weed, so smoke up!"  
and I pounding the rest of it and proceed to fall  
onto some bed with Johnny in my ear pleading  
"Come on Doug get up. We have the other party to get to."  
but it was no good and eventually Johnny trodded off  
with the rest of the gang, but not before if I remember  
right a brotherly rub on my dazed noggin -  
(that is love friend) - and if that wasn't passing out  
it was damn close. Woke up the next morn with  
my contacts compounding my blurred vision all the  
more and I jumped into a rattle trap bus back down  
to Dupont giving my skelton its just reward...

*so sorry  
I missed that party  
Johnny Mel*

So when the hapless times end  
it is time to realize that  
there is no black and white  
NO WAVING CHECKERED FLAG  
in this dull grey world

(all men are created equal  
it's immediately after that  
that things get fucked up)

OR

(all men are created equal  
but don't necessarily end up  
that way)

So armed with nothing more  
than an UNCOMMON PALLOR  
we must now move past the blast

(oh blasphemous woes  
now pushing past  
the battlefield believers  
and bunker lovers)

Here's to hope  
we're all a little sharper now  
we're all a little more awake  
we watch the shadows now  
and the spirit in the other face

but now for the final wish  
that the fire in us  
continues to burn  
not to fall back asleep again  
in the poppies and snow flakes

So  
    stuck  
        in

THIS WORLD OF HURT  
this world's beloved MEGAhurts

plodding along  
unknowingly making our way  
closer to the headstone arcade

keeping eyes peeled  
for the beauty and the love  
remembering we are wisps  
of joy and pain in between  
the expansive pauses  
LULLS IN THE ACTION

*the perfect time to realize*

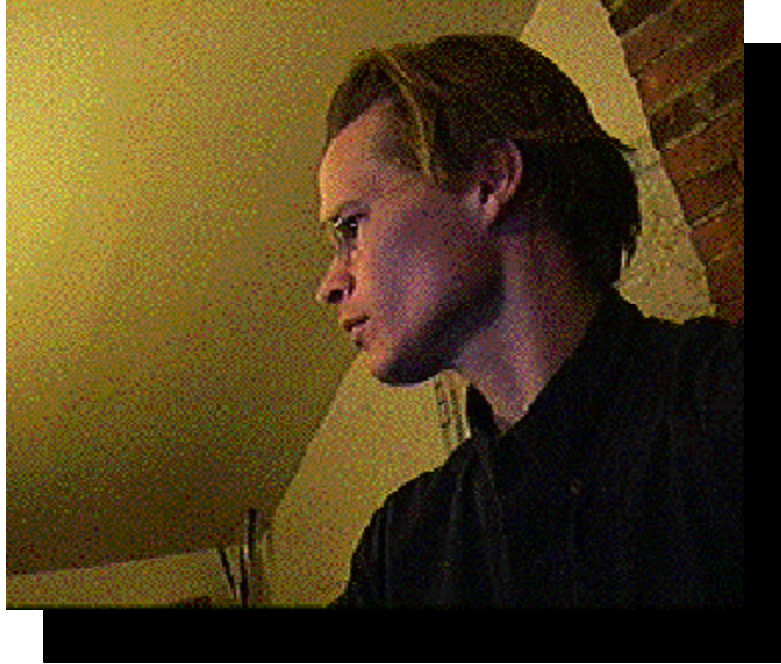
this is only temporary  
this is not forever

we are flickers

GLIMMERS

{We're ALL  
stars in heaven}





Doug Baker lives in Central Pennsylvania with his wife, Deanna, and their two children, Evan and Olivia.