

The Professor Retires

The books are boxed
and stacked
and ready for the mover.
The old metal shelves
that once sagged
with the weight of all
that worldly wisdom,
are empty and wanting and
waiting for the next occupant,
the next generation.

You have rushed through
this life, a life that has
faithfully followed the straight
and certain path of uncertainty,
to arrive at this precise moment
when you find the relevance
in an otherwise irrelevant world.
The indifference of it all
might have once
roiled your soul,
but not today and
probably not tomorrow—
definitely not tomorrow,
which is already reserved
for late mornings and
false bravado and
dreams of immortality.

You stand in the shadow
of the door wide open and see
the books, see the shelves,
see the visions and the
memories, clear as the glass
in the only window. And then,

when the room is finally filled
with all you are leaving behind,
you turn your back
and the door closes behind you.

Eldorado

A search for gold is
a search for strength
(Poe understood this only
too well) – the strength
of a miner's lamp against
the dankest darkness, of a block
of timber in the deepest shaft,
the strength of water rushing
toward the Earth's end where
all things go to die.

Unlike Poe, I have stood
knee-deep in that cold
merciless water, tin pan
in hand, searching for the
inner strength to continue
the quest for that glittery illusion
that makes a mockery
of old age. But in the
shadow of full daylight,
it drains away
with the water, leaving
only its reflection behind.

Exercise

Every morning, without fail,
I lower myself to the carpeted
floor to exercise: 20 pushups,
10 sit-ups, followed
by some army stretches—
no trendy tai chi or yoga poses,
not for this aging boomer.

And every morning, as I lie
on that floor gathering my breath
and feeling my pulse pound
(so grateful I still have a pulse),
I wonder
when the day will come
(and it will come) when
I get down and can't rise up.
Will that day come with
subtle foretelling signs such
that each day I take just a few
seconds longer? Or will
I be down and have to scoot to
a chair to pull myself up
like a baby learning to stand? Or
perhaps one day, without warning,
I will simply stay on the floor,
close my eyes, and go to sleep,
never to rise again. That,
I think, would be a good day.

Rap Song

Last night, I dreamed I wrote a rap song.
Not the poem I was trying
to write when the sun was high
and warm and caressing my sagging
shoulders like an electric blanket.
But a rap song.
At least I think it
was a rap song. In my dream
it was a rap song.
But now that the dream has faded,
I'm not so sure. I mean,
I've never really listened
to rap music. I
don't have kids who listen
to rap music, so where this dream
came from is a question only
a Freudian could answer.
Here am I, a father, a grandfather,
a proud product of the sixties, cursed
with a defective cerebellum. A
man skating on the very edge of
senility, staring with wide eyes into
the black hole of old age where
the singers I idolized and
imitated are already waiting, their
voices rusted by time.

Besides, I'm not sure I would
even know how to write a rap song.
I mean, what could I possibly say
about hitches and bows?
Hitches and bows? Could they really
be rapping about sewing...or
tying knots? It doesn't make any
sense. But then, a lot of what these
young people do today makes no sense.
Lord, I sound like my mother

(God rest her soul).

Okay, so what the hell,
let's give it a try anyway:
I awoke with the words still in my head,
syllables dangling like beads of lead,
something about a girl in bed.
I think I better write that poem instead.

Once Upon a Time

Once upon a time,
not so very long ago
(or so it seems),
this world was all
youth and innocence –
or maybe it just appeared
that way to the
new and naïve,
the sheltered elite.

It was a time when
orange shag carpet on
the living room floor
raised compliments,
not eyebrows, when
mixing paisley with
madras was as much a
positive fashion statement
as wide collars, flared jeans,
and bright polyester –
Tony Manero alive and well.
A time when I could
look down and see my...
well, never mind. Who
really needs to see
his own belt buckle?

There was that time;
there is this time;
there is the passing of time.
I look ahead and see
the future through the
telescope of experience.
I tweak the lens but see only
the same unknowable fog
that has always been there.
I see, just as in the old philosophy

class joke, that the questions always
remain the same; only
the answers ever change.