

Christmas Lunch

At dawn the warm dry winds blow across the wide brown plains gently stirring the dust, fluttering a few dried leaves.
Christmas morning.

The men (father and son) were out at dawn,
early, because it's Christmas,
laying out feed for the stock and checking the paddocks.

The kids opened their stockings early, not a lot in them this year because of the drought but still, some chocolates and a
book,

some toys and some nuts.

Enough to keep them quiet till the men get home.

The women (mother and daughter) are cooking.

Two big chooks off the farm and vegetables out of the garden.

It'll be a good feed.

More than usual this year because of the two aboriginal lads on walkabout staying in the barracks.

The men come in from their chores.

“Not much feed left, we'll have to buy in.”

“There's no money.”

“I'll talk to the bank after.”

The family gathers in the big living room and the kids open the presents.

“Oh thanks Dad, that's great.”

“I was hoping for a new saddle.”

“Maybe next year”

Lunch. The lads walk up from the barracks, scrubbed and wearing their best clothes.

“You didn't have to dress up.”

“Yes we did Missus. Mum told us.”

Instructions received over the hissing ether of mobile phones.

After dinner the lads wash up.

“You don't have to.”

“Yes we do Missus. Mum told us.”

More instructions from far away.

After dinner music on the veranda.

Guitar and harmonica, singing songs of yesterday and today laughing sharing a beer.

The daughter from Sydney rings and shares her season with the family.

Later that night the men on the veranda share a once a year cigar.

“It's been a good Christmas Dad.”

“Yeah.”

Silence.

“Maybe it'll rain soon.”

And the warm dry winds blow across the wide brown plains gently stirring the dust, fluttering a few dried leaves.

Twelve

I remember when I was twelve.
Running all through those long summer days
All skinny arms and legs
Brown and scabbed
It never rained
Was never cloudy

Playing by the creek
Climbing the clay cliffs
Digging caves
Exploring in the long grass
Building hides
Of bracken and twigs

Following the creek to find monsters
Paddling in pools
Chasing tadpoles
Downstream to the orchards
Stealing oranges
From the farmers trees

Never out of energy
Going all day
Running and jumping until bedtime
When my head hit the pillow
And I slept
Dreamless and happy until morn

I'm glad I'm not twelve
Sometimes
But sometimes I miss it
I haven't the energy
And I don't sleep as well
But I still have the imagination.

Haiku

Fireworks paint their light on Black velvet

Spinning false dawn of coloured flowers

Sunday

It is four weeks since you left.

Driven from home by a sort of lazy restlessness

I take a sandwich, a bottle of coke and a book

I've always meant to re read War and Peace

And go to the Park.

Relaxed in the shade on a bench I totally fail to open Tolstoy.

Families at play surround me

The smell of sausages and onion from barbeques scents the air.

Family cricket with all its jealousies and passions.

A team is short, Uncle Jim snoozes in the sun.

A passing stranger, Hey Mister and waving unfamiliar bat and American accent he joins

“If it goes in the creek you're out” He smiles puzzled.

The warmth and pleasantness pass my fortress walls and I slowly relax into sleep.

Later awake the game is over. The kids squabble amicably over runs and outs

The passing stranger with a beer and still so American talks to blonde Aunt Susan

The single one

The sun slowly tracks down the sky

Packing up my half eaten sandwich and still virginal book I go home.

To think some more of you.

Children

I still remember vividly holding my children for the first time.

Feeling the awe that came with knowing they were mine.

Looking at this new life and loving it so much.

The beauty of the porcelain skin and the fine tracery, like tattoos, of the veins

Knowing that it meant that I would continue after I was gone.

Now I am honoured with grandchildren

And holding them I feel the same love and wonder

I see the same beauty

I experience the same intimations of immortality

But I also know that I can give them back.

On being fifty

In my head I'm always nineteen

When a pretty young girl passes and smiles

I draw myself up suck in my gut and smile back

Relaxing back to my real self when she's gone

I watch the marathon start and know if I wasn't so busy I'd be there

Running the course in four hours and raising money for God knows who

Maybe next year.

Then I stand up and my knees are locked from sitting too long

Or I wake from a dream and trip over the cat while going to the loo at 2am. Again!

It's not all bad though turning fifty.

I've got nothing left to prove.

No more posturing on the football field or the cricket nets.

Or bellying up to the bar in silly drinking sessions

Behaving like randy rams in head butting competitions

My life is gentler now and more relaxed.

But in my head I'm always nineteen.

BLOCKED!

How often have I sat,
Pen in hand.
Fingers poised over the keyboard
Gazing at the flickering screen, virginal paper
Playing solitaire or drawing complicated doodles
Unable to face the total lack of ideas

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BLOCKED

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BLOCKED

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Where does inspiration hide on rainy afternoons in winter
The summer's easy to explain as the words vanish behind images of yellow sand
Of shady seats in parks and chilled chardonnay at cellar door sales.
But why can't I create in winter
There's nothing else to do no distractions calling me to laziness.
No pleasant afternoon sun to beckon me to snooze on shady couch beneath fragrant trees.

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There I go again
Thinking of anything but work
I must concentrate, get back to writing
But in the meantime
Here's a verse.

A Question of Wisdom

They say age brings wisdom

So they say.

It doesn't make sense to me. I don't buy it.

The older I get the more confused I am.

I simply lack the moral certitude I had as a teenager.

I knew how to save the world I knew what was right and what was wrong

I saw everything in black and white

Today I have palpitations deciding what to have for lunch.

When I was young the big issues were so obvious.

He was right, he was wrong and I could see it so clearly.

Was the world simpler then or was I?

Is it just that I have become too willing to see both sides?

Oh God have I become a fence sitter?

Someone who just wants a quiet life.

Surely not, I haven't changed that much have I?

Where has the fiery young liberal gone?

Is he cowering behind a closet conservative?

Oh please can I have the old world back, I knew what to do then.

Wisdom?

Oh go away, and let me choose my lunch.

Labels

Why do you label me?

Why do you insist that your world view has power over mine?

Is it so that *your* vision defines me and places me in a box.

I don't want to live in a box

Particularly not one designed by you.

You use labels to help you avoid thinking

They give you the power to treat people as things.

I'm not a thing, I'm a person.

Does it make you comfortable to be able to live by formulae.

Personally I prefer to see things as they are, not as I want them to be.

It can be unsettling but it's certainly more exciting.

You

For Jo

I watch you as you watch fireworks paint their colour in the sky

And see in your joy the child you once were

And know I would have cherished you.

I lie awake sometimes and watch you sleep.

In your relaxation I see the young woman I first met,

And know that I loved you then.

I see you now, watching television, reading a book

I see the woman that you have become.

And know I love you still

I see your face, at the end of a hard day tired and drawn

And see a hint of the woman you one day will be

And know I will still love you then

Why?

For my Mother

Whenever we meet, I want to question

I still need to understand, to lean on you

As I leant on you as a child.

To draw from your knowledge

To find out how to cope

To know why?

But I don't.

A sense of the ridiculous takes over.

I'm over fifty now and surely understand

Everyone else I know does

None of them seems to have this feeling of confusion

This total failure to understand how people can behave that way

Everyone I know is so sure of themselves

So why aren't I?

So tell me please

Why?

Home

I love the smell of eucalyptus.

The distant blue green
of forests of native trees
The harsh calls of parrots
The liquid notes of native birds.

Walking in this wide land
I glory in the sight of ancient hills
Of strange shaped marsupials
Of the colours of its sands and dusts
The whispering gurgles of its precious waters

Why do we not see the beauty that surrounds us?
The simple symmetry of a leaf
With its tracery of veins
The delicate desert flowers
That shine for a single day.

We wrestle the world into unnatural shapes
Hard edges of foreign lawns
Over bright colour of immigrant blooms
And nature's gentler palette goes by ignored

Goodbye

I have watched over the last year,

as you changed.

infected by the dark invader

that corrupted your body and soul

wasted by the emptiness of illness.

Now it's time to say goodbye

To cast a clot of earth

and wish you well.

Now I need to greet a world that no longer has you in it

To watch a sunrise without you.

And I must learn not to hate you

For going on without me

And leaving me alone.

FRAGMENTS

- 1/ Dreams are funny things
People can spend their lives chasing them
Or sometimes they come true overnight
You should never stop dreaming
Otherwise you'll never wake up.
- 2/ When I was young I was told
We know more because we've lived longer
Now I'm older I'm told
We know more because we understand the world
I want to meet someone who knows as little as I do
So we can learn together.
- 3/ Imagination didn't used to be a dirty word
Dreaming used to be the way to the future
When did learning for the sake of it become a waste of time?
What will tomorrow be like?

Ideas

Every time I have a new idea

I worry that it's the last.

Is this the end of my voice

The last word I will speak.

Committing it to paper

Is such a final act

Defining and constricting.

Does the thought cease to live

When it's shackled in chains of ink and paper

Or locked in twists of electrical thought

On computer hard drive or floppy disk

And then I look from my window

Or walk down the road

Or even wake from dreaming sleep

And find another thought

Peeking shyly from behind my worries and concerns

And I once again commit to paper

It may not be very good but it's all mine.

For My Son David on his Wedding Day

6th August 2005

When you were born
I held you in my arms
And looked at you with joy
Wondering
Wondering
Who would you be?
What footmark would you leave
Upon the sands of life?
You grew and every year
Brought joy and anger
Pride and despair
But always love
Every step you took
Faltering at first but firmer
And stronger with every passing day
Filled my heart.
Today I watched you marry
And finally leave the nest
You spread your wings and took
Your adult flight.
Fly high
Shine bright.

Who Am I?

All my life I have been some *thing*.

Not a person but an object

Defined by what I do or who I know.

Many things to many people

And all of them different

And none of them me

But gradually my life is simplifying.

All I am becomes clearer as I grow older

And I find there are only three things I want to be

A Husband, a Father and a Grandfather.

Is anything else really important?

Thursdays

Everyday used to be exactly the same

But lately I find I am agreeing with Arthur Dent

I just can't get the hang of Thursdays

Everything bad seems to happen on a Thursday

I know what to do

I'll sleep through it.

If I ignore it.

It'll go away.

Untitled

I woke in the night.

The sound of thunder echoed in the distance

Almost lonely

Rain was falling on the roof

A sleepy comfortable sound

You sighed and turned and slipped deeper into sleep

I lay half awake listening to your gentle breathing.

I must have slept then because when I opened my eyes it was light

You still breathed soft and slow

And the rain still kissed our roof with a gentle hiss of sound.

I lay and listened and realised how lucky I am

That you are in my life.

Democracy

Hey it's a pretty crap way to run the world.

And anyway the American's invented it.

So it can't be good.

Let's elect a king.

Little Johnnie Howard would look good in a crown

But you can't elect him

That's democracy.

Look we've already got a Queen.

But you don't like her.

We didn't choose her.

But choosing that's democracy.

So that's no good.

So do we like democracy.

But you don't cause you don't want Iraq to have it.

Well at least I live in a country

Where I can say what I like.

And no-one will put me in gaol

Unless I'm a Moslem

Or a communist

Or I like the Americans

Or the Queen

Belief

What you believe is really all you own.

A wise man said that once.

But we change our minds daily

It's easier to let someone tell us what we think.

So we wait to see what our paper tells us is true.

What the blonde on the 6.00 o'clock news believes this week.

“After all I've got to go to work

The kids are starting school next week

I'm sure the papers know

I don't have time to read

I must watch my shows.

The TV news is up to date.

And anyway. They know better.”

So what do *you* believe this week?