

2010-20 Five Poems of Aging

(Incidents in life which forced me to reflect on the challenges of aging and death.)

Strategies for the Journey

Harry Strachan, June 15, 2008

1. Start with a Quiet Time

Cup of hot coffee on the arm of the easy chair,
Someone's reflections to plant a good thought
Feet flat on the floor, back straight, breathing deep,
Mind quiet, listening ... listening ... listening!

2. Brother body needs his workout

Legs pumping, arms swinging, torso stretching
Preferably on the rolling hills of the golf course.
Brain wrestling with a hard Sudoku or
Poker probabilities – use it or lose it.

3. Daily wonder and gratitude

Feel the hope in the bright sunshine on the grass
Sense the wisdom in the cool wind that brings lightening and rain
Open all memory's doors: success and failure, loves and losses
Be amazed at how nothing killed, everything nourished!

4. Face outward

Monks turn daily chores into sacred rituals
Case team meetings are an opportunity to cheerlead
The best conversations are about others
Widen the boundaries of self, expand the sphere of concern

5. Learn to love well

You walk on your own feet, but you can hold hands
You think your own thoughts, but you can laugh together
While it's her task, you can lend a shoulder
Nightmares are disarmed when you sleep curled around each other.

Hot Air Balloon

Meditation Poem
Harry Strachan, 120216

I climb up out of dreams of being lost,
Adrenaline in my veins, dread on my mind.
My aged hip, my faltering memory,
My lost hearing, the absence of a paycheck
Remind me I am entering old age.

Experts assure me I'll live thirty year longer
Than the great grandparents I never knew,
That I'm entering the golden years,
A time of greater depth and happiness.
But I am far from convinced.

The secret they say is to see life
As staircase climbing ever upward,
Not as an arc, first rising gloriously,
Then descending to decrepitude.
But is this a truth that sets one free?

I'm also told to meditate on my death.
Until you're ready to die, you won't live.
To review my past for what I can learn,
But not allow myself regrets.
Advice both inconsistent and baffling.

Then I review the history of my garden,
Note that seeds of failure produced the best plants,
See how the unexpected detours
Steered me to my heart's destination.
In paradoxes, there are truths I can trust.

In any case, morning has arrived; the day stretches ahead.
Agnostic about the future, I decide that,
For the present, I'll picture a hot air balloon
Climbing toward the sunset,
As I allow ballast to fall overboard.

Or, perhaps better, as a journey toward home.
I remind myself: Provision adequately.
Believe that no matter what, I'll arrive.
Enjoy my companions. Let fears go.
Concentrate on walking each step ahead well.

Packing for the Journey

Harry Strachan, July 7, 2013

In my dream
The day's speeches are over.
Alone at the door of my apartment
The darkness of night closes in.

The job ahead,
Weighs heavy on me:
By tomorrow all must be empty
Closets and shelves vacated.

There is no room for
That favorite frayed shirt,
Old passports,
Grandfather's tattered Bible

Each seems to be saying,
"Please take me,
You need me,
Without me, who are you?"

Desperately I consider
Shipping them FedEx
Or making gifts,
But it's too late,

The time of leaving is fixed
The journey's end unknown
There is no option,
All must be discarded.

Awake, still vibrating with anxiety,
I sense a warning of death,
The time is short
And I'm too attached!

The Mystery of His Last Moments

Harry Strachan, November 19, 2017

They found him no longer breathing
Sitting erect with easy face
On his meditation couch.

At his side an iPhone camera
Photos time stamped 9:10 am.

On his computer Father Rohr's
Immortal Diamond at Chapter Two.



His weekly Journal
Last saved at 8:52 am

Photos of the room made warm
By his wife's decorations he rarely noticed.

Wooden animal heads from Africa
Observing albums and books.

Two dragons reflecting
The inner conflict he often felt,

Two candles standing
Unlit in prayer



And on the upstairs walkway
Plants lovingly watered.

His last journal appeared to
Summarize Rohr's message about
An "allowing God" and a "spacious True Self"

Advice to "Join God in being patient
With both good and evil",
Being "aware," avoid "judging,"

"Love trumps everything.
We move through it all our lives.
It will carry us through death
To a place we can't imagine."

The journal ended with a question,
"On the road ahead, is my priority
To find God or my True Self?"

How he answered that question
And what he found on the other side
Is still a Mystery.

Grace for the Moment

Harry Strachan, Jan 2, 2020

Ten cousins in their seventies gather for lunch.
Half know they are incurably ill.
Half only that their certain end is near.
They begin to share their stories.

“At our age, gratitude is not a virtue,
It’s a survival skill!”
“Mature hope doesn’t have specific expectations!
It’s open but trusts ultimate goodness.”

She: “Twenty years ago, the doctors told me
‘The good news: you won’t die.
The bad news: you’ll live at 10%!’
Without God’s Grace, I couldn’t have made it!”

Impulsively, I ask her “May I play you a song?”
“Yes.” From my iPhone on the dining table,
Accompanied only by guitar,
The clean soprano voice begins.

We listen in silence.
Across the table, she clasps
The dying cousins’ hand.
As they weep, tears come to all our eyes.

“Grace for the moment, all that I need
Grace for the moment and faith to receive
All the promises given to those who believe
Grace for the moment, all that I need.i”

ⁱ Chorus of Grace for the Moment, written and sung by Tricia Walker (and Buddy Greene)