Evenings

Yesterday at twilight, after Mother left her sorrows
To sail on the waiting river, her body in a morgue,
We arrived too late for goodbye, instead carried in
Past nursing home aides, our litany of votive candles,
Photos of a proud navy vet and her first pregnancy,
A mountain bird CD, but the book was found on her shelf
Creased to Wordsworth’s poem, romanticizing a woman
Who lived unknown and remote.

I remembered evenings with the home planetarium,
As the black orb lifted from its cradle of drab cardboard,
Braced in the coffee table among three jumpy youngsters,
All expecting luminous projections like a Van Gogh
Starry night painting until it switched on, only to show
A feeble heaven around the angular living room,
Highlighting my unease at her vulnerability
As an atheist to her dying day.

Other times we kids would rearrange furniture sections,
Create wall space, quibble to control the slide projector
While bright images of Hawaiian flowers and landscapes,
Still crisply organized after ten maybe fifteen years,
Flashed her memories with a tinny mechanical sound,
Loading, unloading breezy, island paradise stories,
The reframed exotic moments when a happy marriage
Had been a sweet possibility.
Today for the last time, as her front door minus nameplate, 
Slowly closes on a white, almost empty apartment, 
A single, dark red carnation left near the window glows 
An offering to the stark settlement of her long life, 
And signals a pause for staff when they enter next. 
With any grace, gentle Adia, the hairdresser will 
Appear at sunset, remembering the feisty lady 
Who simply wanted help, to do it herself. 

Dave Luker
Dispatching the College Admissions Essay

Noticeably cooler,  
Wind out of the north, here  
In Nebraska, that’s how summer ends,  
Bright, wispy clouds above a day afield,  
On the river terraces edging the Platte,  
A line of boys in camo and blaze orange  
Stalking through heavy cover  
For upland birds: pheasants and chukkers  
With blood-red beaks, red legs  
And feathery olive-grey zebra strips.

He had prepped for this first hunt  
By intercepting the saucer  
Trajectories of bright neon clay skeets,  
Using his grandpa’s 20-gauge, pump Remington  
And today, with a gun dog  
Working to flush game up  
Against the autumn sky,  
The explosive wing beats pull him  
To swivel, smoothly click the safety,  
Shoulder and aim.

Except it’s not a clean shot,  
The wounded bird flails and flaps  
In the dry brush, a weakening, raspy sound,  
Scraping all his enthusiasm,  
Down to a single realization  
As stark as old bone-  
He’d taken a life.  
Yet the discharge had cleared a small place  
To make a stand, where years later,  
He begins his application to City College
Teens

Woolgathering, busy moonraking
fashioning too few memories
of what they love
who they love
all future no past
I write of the few and the many
teens today, adults tomorrow
their yesterdays of little consequence
the ambitious hear a trumpet call
of grand tomorrows
fear of death has no hold
blissfully they hurry on
on summer’s school-less days
while the schoolrooms gather dust,
a musty smell,
they work for little pay
when darkness steals the daylight
the feckless play
the wise sleep,
dream of grand tomorrows.
Nebraska’s Home Grown Stranger

My land mystifies strangers
‘specially those from big cities
and those from the other side of
our great country’s two mountain ranges
to them all farm land looks flat,
but it’s not,
they ought to pull to the side of the road
get out,
take a closer look
be mystified by how many
north-south criks an east west streams
run through plowed fields,
hope none of them ask the difference
‘tween a crik and a stream
or how wide and deep water has to be to be a river,
past years the wash was dry most nearly all year
‘cept when the spring runoff came
this year overflowed its banks
ruined lots of the plantings,
those city folks probably never give a thought
how much irrigatin’ crops need
don’t come close enough to see the
dozens of well heads and miles of pipe
course some things mystify me too
like when I take my grain to the elevator
compare the price I get
to the price Kellogg gets for it’s cornflakes,
same thing when we go into town
to buy what Clara and I can’t make
I hear about how Cabel Adams and
most everybody else is in hock
yet the front page of the weekly says
Congress passed another farm bill
I ask myself, “Where does all the money go?
Who gets it?

lots of us eat at Pizza Hut,
while standing in line for their fine buffet
we wonder why Sally’s Restaurant closed,
munching at our table we lament
the closing of the Bijou movie house
then argue over what DVD to rent
or should we pay Amazon or Netflix to watch something,
on the way to Wal-Mart we pass Watt’s Hardware
I say to Clara, “Sad to see it close.”

on the ride back to our place
we turn left at Ackland’s mail box
onto the county road to Clatonia
the road goes all the way to Saline
that’s something else that mystifies strangers
they’re confused as to whether to say Say-line or Suh-leen

once we reach home I’ll show you my new John Deere
the one with the 747 control panel
I may have to hire a software engineer
to program all those peripherals
hanging off its rear end,
or read one of those “How To” APPs
it picks, shills, augers so fast a body can’t get no rest,

don’t know why I keep that old machinery in the yard
no good for spare parts anymore
being a farmer and an engineer not good enough today
have to be an accountant, agronomist, computer whiz
which reminds me
of another thing they talk about at the Grange,
how all the boys leave the farm
Future Farmers of America say there is no future
takes fewer of us to grow more stuff
and there’s too few town jobs
all those farm boys are emigratin’

on the way to my place you’ll see empty barns
sun’s bleached the color out of the sidings
once was a farmhouse near by, collapsed now,
you can tell they didn’t build the house strong as the barn
a family’s dream bulldozed over and under
look down that nearly disappeared lane,
see the ridge at the end of it
homesteader built his sod house against its spine
a shiny yellow house there now
can’t tell from here if the siding is plastic or aluminum
won’t matter none
the sun won’t care, it’ll do its job over time
Ralph Sims still lives in the family home
funny, when he farmed his own land
he drove Toyotas, Hondas
now he manages for the Japanese,
ten times the acres he owned
now he drives a Cadillac
heard the Japanese are going to sell out
think they’re sellin’ ‘cause Ralph doesn’t drive a Lexus?
I’m starting to feel like one of them city fellas,
mystified by my own land,
a stranger in my own land.
Poem 1

The Elderly Are Prone to Falling

From the door I see the junk man wheel away my dusty old green-and-silver ladies' coaster bicycle, the spokes all adorned with cobwebs and the basket broken somewhat.

He may know my bike-riding days are over, but can't guess at how swiftly they went by like the road beneath new tires until--my last, worst mishap.
Poem 2

Protective Custody

Because she was a danger to herself
the law required this restraint, he said.
There they stood, a girl of sixteen
and an officer of the law. He must
have been a father, for he said, on seeing
curious looks of those who came along,
“You may want to let your sleeves hide
the handcuffs.” Lifting both hands, then,
she touched them to the corners of her eyes,
mascara smudged, and let fall those same
small hands—scarce a danger anymore—
so that her coat sleeves might conceal her chains
and near-destruction. This smallest of kindnesses
was what she thought of on the way to the hospital,
for life, of late, had not been kind to her.
I am an artist who
before I am assailed with the next hare-brained scheme
of my nervous, restless muse
finds no greater pleasure than long frittered moments
of mindless visual consumption--
I mean really gluttonous and drooling communion with my finished work.
I think of it as my progeny.

And, similarly, when I’m not depressed
I like to remember my past
in the same fashion,
regaling my memory with story upon story
of that woven masterpiece, my life.

So I think about the old ones,
who don’t create much anymore,
whose masterpiece is large and near complete,
(their future so minimal, their past so baroque)

when they silently appeal to me,
as they ready their work for jury
into that most prestigious show,
to see the exquisite skill,
the subtle and incomparable nuance

of their most ground-breaking lives,
their stories repeated like Warhols,
gaining in strength with the rhythm of each retelling.
They’re done with the painting, by and large,
executed in countless layers,
the iconography developed solidly over time.
All they really want from me is presentation.
“Frame this for me with your ears,” they say,
“and it will win for sure.”
The days of summer revolve
toward water
that scoops her up
and splashes the hours outward--
bright hours, wet with sheen,
dripping minutes for days.

Weeks puddle up for a summering child
who revels
in the gritty, sandy edges of Sundays
which roll endlessly thru Tuesdays
and Thursdays, resting breathlessly beneath
the flickering leaves of the Friday trees.
And they bend down,
bend down to sweep the summer seconds by.

Jacqueline Eihausen
Elders Track 2019
"Summering"
A Grandmother’s Envy
(My view of Youth)

When I look at youth
A sudden light of transparency
lets me see their tight muscles,
their smooth skin
and their long and glorious hair
often bound in a knot or loose
and swinging like a pendulum
as they canter down main street
stopping now and then to greet
friends hanging out at the street corner,
across from the bar and restaurant where they
and opponent teams in our small community
have forever gathered for burgers and fries
after ballgames.

How I envy them
they are visages of my own teenage past
when what was important was
hoping you passed the algebra test or
that the right boy smiled at you or
passed you notes in Assembly
Today I doubt there is such a gathering of all
high school students in a similar location
Or that their primary concern is a boy or girl
relationship
Of course I could be wrong
Those teenagers hanging out on street corners
live in a different dimension:
They are far more educated than my generation
was at their age. Perhaps in time they will have answers
To some of the world’s major concerns
Ambling Maturity

Walmart shoppers may see me ambling along
drifting left
then darting right
Like many old folks of eighty
Some are spared
From tumbling about
Others use a cane or walkers
Or push a cart full of goods to purchase at checkout Me? I have this stubborn streak I prefer
yawing Creating a disturbance Stirring up the waters of suspicion Like an old ship in stormy
weather I have lost my tethering.
My limbs may be like old timber
But I refuse to be the old lady
Everyone sees in Walmart
Teenagers
Handsome youngsters pass
without a glance
we will never have a chance
to know them
wearing buds in their ears
each pecks at their phone
the world goes by
as they wander alone
and shun the beauty
of a summer day.

Jodie Johns
CEDAR GROVE HOME

Days drag by, boredom reigns
folks revert to memory lane
bland meals, an air of gloom
a constant hum from other rooms
each day seems a dreary gray
families come but do not stay
In calm repose the residents wait
anxious for this scheduled date
one by one they fill the hall
to await a leader who will call
today's game.

BINGO
It’s great to be old
And know so many things.

To sit again like a child
And watch the clouds go by.

To make the shapes of birds
Beasts and flying things.

And now I just don’t care
Who watches me stare.

My faith in God
Has been restored.

Now soon I will go home
To be with my Lord.
How tiny and pink are
My granddaughter’s toes

I can play This Little Piggy
All in a row.

How bright her eyes become
When I kiss her little big thumbs.

She giggles and wiggles
To want more fun.

How precious are the arms I hold
As time passes and I grow old.