

# Some Poems

by

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First Installment

## An Old Closet

I thought I knew  
how to write poetry too,  
long phrases wrapped around  
an image or a sound,  
longing languid tones  
tumbrously turning over  
tongue and time,  
whipped up by rhyme.

I thought I knew  
how to turn a phrase,  
this way and that,  
like twirling a hat  
on a whim or a lark  
the sharp canine bark.

I thought I knew  
how to haul these frills  
from a closet of disuse,  
and adding juice,  
roust out the best  
arrow to the bow.

But I was wrong.  
The arm not used  
forgets to bend and throw,  
and now the words  
I wish to write  
I cannot, do not know.

- Mark Friedman  
Sedona  
October 1, 1999

## Lizard-s Song

Blink, blink, open eye  
warm sun, warm rock  
no time, no clock..

Life is long pauses  
life is simple causes  
snakes and crickets  
no speeding tickets.

You could learn a lot from me  
you, too big too clumsy  
warm blooded mercenary.

Move hand, close eye  
good sun, good rock  
no time, no clock  
no house to lock.

- Mark Friedman  
Sedona  
October 3, 1999

## All That's Small

I am married to the world.  
I wake up each day  
and it is there beside me,  
rumped from the bed sheets,  
sulking, angry at our  
quarrel from the night before.

!You are beautiful,@ I say.  
The sun, the skies,  
the waffles and french fries,  
long slanting light beneath  
the clouds, the seagulls= cries.

!Why are you so mean to me?@  
I slave for you and gift  
you over with each surprise,  
money won, attentive eyes,  
the sparkling prize.

!The wrong gifts,@ you say.  
!Not papers, speeches, pay.  
You must attend the little things,  
the flower=s fall, the insect wings.  
All that=s good is all that=s small.@

!Your eyes are so big, your vision=s gone  
Bring me the skimming rock and the lock of hair.  
Bring me the swallow=s song and the rocking chair.  
And I will sleep with you one more day and night,  
and love you softly if you dare.@

- Mark Friedman  
Sedona  
October 1, 1999



## Jury Duty

I am prepared to pass  
judgement on man  
woman and child  
in this ever so mild  
mannered process of  
soft spoken tones  
over broken bones

I am prepared to speak  
the whole truth  
and nothing so ruth-  
less as truth told whole,  
the bare boned soul

But I leave  
the task to those  
who can afford to stay  
and spend a week or two  
as cogs and gears  
in this maze of tears

I wish I could  
render judgement on those  
who take young men to jail  
for things we fail to do.

I wish the whole truth  
were really spoken here  
and not some case by case  
jury-rigged act  
of truth and dare.

The jury is still out  
it must be said  
on whether we,  
the honest upright ones  
when it comes to truth,  
when it comes to dread  
haven't got and earned our share.

- November 24, 1999

## The Old, West

Pine bluffs, at the poker table.  
Oak reaches for his gun.  
One too many cardemon seeds.  
Time to leave.

The hand draws a line  
across the horizon,  
smooth then ragged,  
pineapple sun drops  
raining down.

The old west.  
The west that never was.  
The west that never will be.

Interlopers, antelopers.  
Forced march to the swimming pool.  
Grueling ride to the grocery store.  
Nothing too hard  
that it can't be made easy.

Oak reaches for his flashlight;  
shine it down the burrow,  
find the glowing eyes.

It's safe to come out now.  
It's safe to run to the edge,  
and stop and stare,  
and dare the bottom to topple up,  
and dare God to show his hand.

- Mark Friedman  
Sedona  
October 2, 1999

### Rhyme rules

Heaven forbid that a poem should rhyme.  
You'd think from the fussing that it was a crime  
for words to be matched by the sounds that they make  
as if by that matching all poets forsake  
any sense of good taste and the right to release  
any thing not approved by the poet police.

Poems have lives, I sincerely believe  
and reasons for being we can barely conceive  
So whatever we do to restrict and confine  
what we say under rules that set boundaries and lines  
is just wrong I believe, whether your rules or mine.

May 20, 2002

From the Book of Psalms

Her perfect head tilted  
Her neck a white tower.  
Her lips trembling,  
Her mouth glowing hot,  
Her tongue like lava on a mountainside,  
Her eyelashes glistening with steam,  
Her hair wet and dripping.  
AGod, this hot sauce is good,@she said.

Mark Friedman  
March 4, 2002

Never Mind

You have such a nice mind.  
It crackles like rice crispies.  
It snaps shut like a steel wool trap.

It's like a clock or toy bird.  
It gives such clever answers.  
It's a marvel of modern science.

I respect your mind like a rare cheese or a pipe organ.  
I admire it like an acrobat or an alabaster swan.  
It's all I can do to contain my joy of it.  
I am totally in it's wake like a capsized boat.

I wish I could borrow it to sew the buttons on my coat  
or fix the bathroom fan.

January 25, 1976

## A Clean New Space

A powerful wind swept up  
from the southwest  
and spun the dust  
above the cholla and juniper,  
and stretched the clouds  
in long thin strands  
like brittle taffy  
(delete: about to break,)  
and carried away  
the poisons and decay  
that clung as cloying spirits  
above the roads and towns and rivers.

Wind is a cleanser, a carver,  
a slap in the face  
to anything that stands  
too long in one place,  
a howler that chases off  
the timid, the tenuous, the dead.

I need this wind  
to cleanse me,  
to sweep away the poison feelings,  
topple down the dead ideas,  
churn and challenge and change  
this place of too much noise  
and too much waste  
to crisp, calm, quiet space  
where I can breathe again,  
and think again,  
and love again.

Mark Friedman  
March 4, 2002

## Boats

Your words rang like sacred bells  
and filled that small space  
with harmonics of light and breath  
where the highest notes disappear  
in a wisp of longing.

We go down to the water to stare across.  
The river of tears and possibilities  
where you and I must wait to cross over,  
must wait for a boat to land us safe on the other side.

We are the only hope, you and I  
We make the only possible way across.  
For boats that can carry two can not carry one.  
And only those who choose to live without fear  
Are allowed to ride.

April 27, 2002 at Judyth Hill's Writing Workshop