

*To Dream
A Different Dream*

Robert P. Grimminck

Folker Press • Arva

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Dedicated to

My wife Teresa
Who encouraged me to follow my heart
and to my five sons
Robert, Michael, Matthew, Nicholas and Steven
That they will come to realize that
life has more than one dream

Acknowledgements

Dr. K. Sohail
My sister Olga
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Sandra Hennessey
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Jane Urquhart
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Anne Aguirre
Fanshawe College

For your encouragement and for
sharing in my dream

Forward

In 1993 Robert began a personal diary, which was encouraged by his grade 12 English teacher at the Centre for Lifelong Learning in London, Ontario. Over the course of the years doing lectures in the community, many people inquired where they could buy a book containing his life story and poetry. This prompted Robert to write a book using his personal diary that describes his journey through continuing education and the poetry, which was written at that time. As you read his biography you will notice the evolution of his writing skills from the time he began adult education to the end, when he graduated from Fanshawe College. Most of Robert's work was done on a computer word processor and later using a word recognition program. Although he is a firm believer of high-tech writing aids, he says learning to read well was the major factor in his developing better writing and mathematical skills.

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Biography

Part II

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Part III

A Source of Inspiration
(Robert Grimminck interviewed by Dr. K. Sohail)

Introduction

Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I would, or could write a book about my thoughts, poetry and life story that would inspire people. In this humble book, my intent is to inspire and to promote adult and continuing education. Over the years I have received many letters, some of them from very respected and prominent Canadian authors, encouraging me to continue writing. Many people have expressed that I can be very proud of my accomplishments and perseverance.

While searching for a title for this book, it occurred to me that there are many people like myself, who are generally happy, but have an underlying frustration, feeling continually trapped. It is as though our lives were not complete, having unfinished business from our past. I was a person who was not quite sure where I fitted into society, continually having this strong urge to further myself, daunted by a fear of failure.

For years I found it very troublesome and still do at times, to express myself through written or spoken communication, as if there is an invisible abstraction that imprisons me. Many people in this dilemma are functional illiterates, and some are abused, suffering from lack of confidence and low self-esteem. Many would like to escape, but they need a spark of inspiration and guidance to allow themselves to break free.

To understand my achievements, not only in writing and poetry, but in positive development, you must journey a little into my past and how it led to writing this book. It took half a lifetime and a personal tragedy, to lead me to the truth that dwells within us all.

To Dream A Different Dream

Sometimes
all we have to do
is
dream a different dream
and
really believe
it will come true

The Journey Begins

As a specialized window and door carpenter for a window manufacturer in London, Ontario, I had always enjoyed going to work and was employed there just over nine years, with an admirable work record. It was a job that I was satisfied to do all the rest of my working career. Then on March 10th, 1992 that all changed. As I was walking back to my workbench after my last break of the day, I stepped on a loose steel lid and tripped over a piece of wood stuck between the lid and floor. I went flying towards a large rubber vacuum hose and bounced off it, landing ten feet back against a steel rack. I then fell down to a cement floor, flat on my backside. I got up, felt a little sore and told my supervisor what happened, then finished the rest of my day's work and went home.

By the time I got home I could hardly move. I was losing all feeling in my legs and walking became difficult. The next morning I went to my family physician to see if any damage had occurred. The physician suggested that I take time off from work because she believed there was more damage than originally thought. I went home with a fistful of painkillers and muscle relaxants.

The pains worsened and so did the pain killer intake. The family doctor felt it was time to see a back specialist. My original appointment was a year away, but through a stroke of luck, it was moved up to three weeks. Having a nurse as my spouse makes for very good connections. I did the whole circuit -X-rays, CAT-scans and M.R.I.s. The results came back and I was diagnosed as having four collapsed disks and two central herniated disks against the sciatic nerve. Walking became a laborious and painful job. I had lost all feeling in both legs and a simple task like going to the washroom was a major undertaking. Surgery was out of the question because the arthritis would eventually cripple me even more.

I was in and out of hospitals in London as well as Toronto's Workers' Compensation medical center, having countless physio and massage rehabilitation therapy sessions. It was so hard to come to terms with my disability and extreme pain. At home, on heavy doses of medication, when I would wake up, the only things that would move were my eyes. Many times my wife Teresa would have to move my stiff arms, and massage my cold unfeeling legs. I always felt confused and was losing control of my life. I started to become dependent on the drugs; they were taking over my life. I had to get off them. Soon the withdrawal from the heavy doses of medication would take its toll. It all seemed much more than my little family and world could handle at the time.

Then my worst fears came true. My lack of education had finally caught up with me. Without the ability to read or write properly, having no math skills and not being able to do any more physical labour, I seriously wondered who would want to hire me, especially when there were so many people with a good education out of work and the workforce was in the midst of a major restructuring.

Coming to terms with my physical disability now seemed like the easiest part. My lifelong handicap, illiteracy, had caught up with me. I had to deal with it in order to regain control over my life and to get back into the work force. So with the enormous help of Teresa and the support of Workers' Compensation, in particular Caseworker Linda Thiel, I set out to take the bull by the horns.

On September 6, 1993, I returned to school totally off the pain medication, as an Adult Learner at the Center for Lifelong Learning. A very kind counsellor, Janet Frame, gave me a grade level assessment. Doing that test brought back deep, unsettling memories from my childhood. I felt very intimidated and vulnerable because they were going to find out what I had tried so hard to keep a secret most of my adult life, that I was a slow learner. As I was doing the assessment I felt as if I were somewhere else. In a trance, I read the questions, over and over, trying very hard to understand what was being asked. The harder the question, the lower my confidence and self-esteem dropped. I felt like an anxious, scared little kid, wishing it would be over soon. When the assessment results came back I had some very mixed feelings. I was at a low grade 7 reading level, a grade 5 writing level and a low grade 5-math level. I could not spell words with more than five letters, let alone put them into a proper grammatical sentence.

In math I could not multiply past five. The counsellor suggested that I start in the A.B.L. (Adult Basic Learning), a 10 week non-credit course. Doing it this way, I would work at my own level and then build upon the skills I did have.

I call A.B.L. adult kindergarten, because this is where I went back to the basic skills in English and mathematics. I learned to build upon those skills with confidence and developed better self-esteem. This was the class where I got over the big psychological hump of my embarrassing spelling and math mistakes. I had to accept the fact that I would never be able to spell or multiply properly and had to start using tools such as a dictionary, thesaurus, grammar book, pocket speller, calculator and computer to help me to achieve my goals. This became the big turning point in my thinking and learning. My teacher Wilma deRond was wonderful. We worked one to one and she understood my individual needs and situation. My inner child was finally being nourished. At the end of the course I received an above A average in English and math and built enough confidence to move on into credit courses.

During the time I was in A.B.L. I was asked by Wilma deRond to speak to the Royal Commission on Learning. I had to prepare a lengthy speech and discuss why adult education is so important today. In my televised speech, I talked about the difficulties of educating a family. My parents immigrated from Europe in 1953 with twelve children. Three more were born here in Canada, I being the fourteenth child. My parents had a hard time understanding the school system and the system did not do much to help them understand. The older siblings and I were pushed through school; some of them were physically beaten, and I am aware of at least one who was sexually assaulted. We didn't acquire much academic knowledge. The older children made many mistakes that were never corrected and they passed them down to the younger ones, resulting in a vicious cycle of repetitive mistakes. Because of this cycle most of us were labeled as slow learners, without anyone discovering the real root cause of the problem.

I was sent to a vocational high school for slow learners in the city of London. It would provide me with a basic education from teachers who were qualified to teach slow learners. I loved my first year at vocational school and became a top student, with my sights set on a photography career. Then in 1972 I was placed into the local high school because the Middlesex County School Board had built a new addition for special learners. So living thirty miles outside the city limits I had no other choice but to go there. The high school had no trained teachers for special learners, no proper guidance to make informed decisions and more importantly, no direction regarding photography. I left the school system at the end of the year, filled with resentment towards my parents and no longer having any faith in the educational system. I eventually found a job in a factory making bicycle tires.

Over the years I have had some very rewarding jobs, but was never very content with them because of my lack of education, poor self-confidence and low self-esteem. Not having a high school diploma made it difficult to advance in any company. Not having the proper education also held me back socially. When it came to helping with my children's homework I found it frustrating and embarrassing and wondered how I could let this happen to my kids, not being able to help them to break out from this vicious cycle. I felt helpless.

That industrial accident on March 10, 1992 became a blessing in disguise. It changed my life, I began to help other adult learners and changed the education system for my children's future.

A direct result of my speech and others at the Royal Commission on Learning was Chapter 9, Recommendation 27 which ensures that all Ontario residents, regardless of age, have access to a secondary school diploma and that publicly funded school boards be given the mandate and funds to provide adult educational programs.

On Nov. 18, 1993 I started credit courses, in ten-week units until September 1, 1994. I took Grade 10 G - Math & English writing, Grade 11 G - English & Mathematics for Technology, Grade 11 G - Visual Arts-Comprehensive, Grade 12 G - English. At Clarke Road secondary high school I took Grade 13 mechanical and architectural drafting along with AutoCad. Eleven subjects five grade levels all in one year, all subjects above A average.

In the spring of 1994, I was asked through my A.B.L. teacher Wilma to join the Fanshawe College Advisory Board. I was to represent Adult Learners as an advisor on a new pilot project called BLUEPRINTS. The newly formed committee felt that I was a good candidate, because through my continuous experience as an Adult Learner, I was moving through the complete system starting at A.B.L. (Adult Basic Learning), then moving into credit courses to receive my OSSD with the hope of attending Community College. They felt my advice would be of great value to the new program.

The BLUEPRINTS committee included representatives from various parts of the community. We were real people who were sincerely concerned with what was going on in the community. Part of my job, as a board member, was to express students' needs. I was asked to advise on many different issues, sometimes as part of one big think tank or just as an individual.

I felt that we were a unique committee tapping into our own resources of experiences, talents and skills, exploring new ways to deal with today's literacy needs. We embraced change and focused on the learners' individual needs. Being active right from the beginning of BLUEPRINTS, I am very proud that as an Adult Learner, I contributed to that cause, not just for myself but for everyone who believes in and could benefit from the program.

I received my OSSD with Honors from the Center for Lifelong Learning in June 1994, Kathleen Belanger, and I were co-ed Valedictorians out of 300 hundred graduating adult students. I wrote the poem "Believe" dedicated to the graduating class of 94. In my speech, I talked about our being at the threshold of new beginnings and fresh hopes. As graduating Adult Learners we had shown that we were willing to change, to move forward, to get on with our lives. We were ready to explore new horizons. Through our own efforts, we had achieved our goals - not just for ourselves, but as examples for others to see and feel inspired.

In September 1994, I started at Fanshawe College in a three year Industrial Design program with a one-year Co-operative work term. In this program I designed every thing from a zipper to a space rocket. At the beginning of the year at the College, in my English course, I received a literacy award for an essay and poster I did on Canadian illiteracy. All Design students were required to write an essay and design a poster about a Canadian author or Canadian book. I chose to write about Canadian illiteracy, not thinking that I would even qualify for the contest, knowing there were over two hundred and fifty students entering. I was awarded third prize. The judges felt the other contestants' posters were more appealing, but knowing that I had the better mark on my essay made me realize I could write. Receiving this award was certainly important to me personally, considering my past.

My interest in writing poetry and short stories started in a grade 10 creative English-writing course at the Center for Lifelong Learning some time in November of 1993. This is where I wrote my first essay, called "A Christmas Morning." It's a story telling what it was like having Christmas with fifteen brothers and sisters during the early part of the sixties. I did very well in this class and became friends with my teacher Sam Morrison. We shared a similar philosophy and liked the same reading material. As luck would have it, Sam also became my Grade 11 English teacher. There he introduced me to a poet by the name of Walt Whitman. I had never read let alone written any kind of poetry in my entire life. So I wrote an essay and did an oral presentation on Walt Whitman in class and received a 11/10. Sam was very impressed and said that I possessed a genuine writing talent and advised me to keep trying to develop it further. As for Walt Whitman, he and his poems had a profound effect on me and opened a floodgate of creative writing.

I continued to write poetry throughout my grade 12 course, but I did it in a personal journal and handed it in at the end of each weekly class. In the journal I would write poems, then philosophize on their true meaning. David Rice, my grade 12 English teacher who read all my work, suggested that I should submit my poetry for publication. Dave thought my poems were very deep and profound, written with a lot of emotion and expressive detail. He wrote in my journal that I have "a talent that's tuned to the eyes and heart."

It was sometime in the spring of 1994 that I gave some of my poetry to Dr. K. Sohail, a Whitby psychiatrist and poet and author of several books published in Canada and abroad. I met Dr. Sohail through a personal friend of ours, Ann Pogue.

He and Ann had asked Teresa and me out for dinner so we could discuss my work. Dr. Sohail said my poetry was expressive, profound and rich with detail. He was amazed that I could write like this, when less than a year ago I was a functional illiterate.

Dr. Sohail did have some concern over my rhyming poems and found they did not suit my style. I wholeheartedly agreed and told him they were more experimental and that I liked free verse far better to express my thoughts. The evening turned out much better than I had anticipated and just added more fuel to the flame of my curiosity to what other authors had to say. In June of 1994, Dr. Sohail wrote to me in a letter, "I just realized that life has given you one more gift, a gift that you could share with people like me and many more. I hope you keep on writing and share with us the fruits of your creativity."

In January of 1995 I decided to send manuscripts of my poetry *Songs of the Inner Child* to five very respected and prominent Canadian authors, seeking to get honest and professional opinions and also to find out if I had a real writing talent. I figured they had nothing to lose by telling me either way. I honestly didn't think most of them would reply, given that they lead very busy lives and that moreover, there could be legalities involved in offering me written opinions.

My first letter came in early February of 1995. The return address was that of June Callwood. My heart was beating so hard I thought it was going to pop out. I didn't want to open the letter. Maybe it was better not to know, I thought, but I couldn't stand the suspense, so I opened it. I was so nervous reading the letter that I missed most of what I was reading. The second time I read the letter it started to bloom like a spring flower. I couldn't believe what I was reading. June Callwood expressed her sincere admiration for all my achievements, saying that I had accomplished an astonishing amount in a very short time, despite obstacles that would discourage most people. June thought my poetry was beautiful and that they (the poems) showed great promise. She also wrote that I have the feelings and mysticism of a real poet. She thought that I should obtain further opinions from people who dealt with or wrote poetry. She hoped that I would continue to write poetry and said that I had a lot of perseverance.

June Callwood is a veteran when it comes to writing. She has written many books and has won many awards, such as The Order of Canada, The Order of Ontario, a Toronto Arts Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award, and twelve honorary doctorates. She is a member of the Canadian News Hall of Fame. Thus her estimation of my work and her encouragement meant a great deal to me.

My next letter came in the second week of February 1995, this time from Margaret Atwood. Margaret Atwood is no doubt a very talented Canadian writer of our time.

She has written many wonderful books, some of which have been made into films, and she has received many awards-- the Governor General's Award, the City of Toronto Book Award, the Canadian Booksellers' Association Author of the Year Award, the Trillium Award and the list goes on.

Again the excitement was overwhelming. This was another big one. I couldn't believe it. What should I do, open the letter or not? Again the suspense was too much to bear. I tore it open. In the letter Ms. Atwood wrote that because of legal reasons, she could not read my poetry, but that since I feel the need to write, I should do so and should not close the now open floodgates. Ms. Atwood wished me the best of luck with my newly discovered talent. It was more than I could have hoped for, from a world-renowned writer.

Now I was starting to feel more confident in my writing, encouraged by comments I had received so far, not only from these professional writers, but mostly from ordinary people like myself. Many people say that I paint pictures in their minds, convey feelings of emotions and make them think in a totally different perspective. "I paint with words and color with feelings."

During my first semester at Fanshawe College, a Professor by the name of Karl Sotiriou was teaching me computer graphics design. I had heard that Karl also taught philosophy and studied theology. I decided to give him some of my poetry and to get his opinion. Karl was deeply moved by my philosophy and writing style.

He suggested that I should never let the innocence of my thoughts become tainted and always write whatever the fountain of inspiration provides me. He went as far as to compare some of my poetry to an Indian poet by the name of Radindranath Tagore, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. This opinion was also confirmed, when I wrote to Dr. Rosemary Dubowchik, whose field of study is medieval music and who is a graduate of Princeton University, New Jersey. Dr. Dubowchik also saw similarities between some of my poems, for example, "Prisoner to Myself", and Tagore's poems. She wrote: "Both are mystical, emotional and full of images of light and darkness." Dr. Dubowchik wrote that I should be proud of my writing accomplishments.

Karl so loved my poems that he set his own time aside so we could have philosophical discussions about what I wrote and why. Near the end of the school year and during our last discussions, the poem *Song of the Inner Child* was inspired to fill the void he would leave when school ended. A small gift for a good friend.

I received a letter from another author, Jane Urquhart. I wasted no time opening her letter. It was hand written. Jane wrote: "What you have been able to accomplish in the past few years is truly wonderful and must be enormously gratifying to yourself and those who love you. I also found it very moving that you not only discovered the joy of reading and writing, but that you have put that joy to creative use." Her sense, from my work in poetry was that she found that I am a deeply spiritual person and that this spirituality will insist that I continue to express myself creatively. In the end she wished me continued success and said that my story is a life-enhancing one.

Jane Urquhart is a wonderful Canadian author who has written several books here and abroad, three of them poetry. Her list of awards is also impressive: the Best Foreign Book Award, (France), and the Les Lettres Nouvelles, the Maurice Nadeau Award and a Governor General's Award. Jane does readings, lectures and many workshops. I couldn't believe that she had actually written me a reply. I drove back to the College to show it to my first year semester English teacher Danna Morningstar. She was working in the design building setting up a display for the twentieth anniversary of the Arts and Letters Society in the art gallery. I gave Danna the letter to see what she thought. Danna had said it was impressive and very wonderful to receive such encouragement from someone whose opinion is well respected in the field of literature. Ironically, the Fanshawe gallery where we were standing houses one of Canada's largest photographic portrait collections of Canadian authors, and there I was, with a letter of praise from one of those exalted authors.

I wrote back to June Callwood to thank her for her advice to seek out opinions from other people involved in poetry. As I closed off her letter, the poem "I Quench" was born. I placed it in the letter for Mrs. Callwood because she inspired it. She is a person of great generosity when it comes to supportive advice and I can't thank her enough.

My fourth letter came from the great Earle Birney, but not directly. It was written by his spouse Wailan Low. On April 27, 1995 Ms. Low wrote that Mr. Birney was elderly and in the hospital. They thought that my poetry was most moving and remarkable and that a twist of fate sometimes carries unexpected rewards. She sent me a copy of the last book Earle had published, *Last Makings*, and hoped I would enjoy it.

Earle Birney is truly a Canadian icon. His list of books and awards is remarkable. I was first introduced to his work in my grade 11 English class. "David" was the first poem I read from his collection, and the first one to come to mind whenever I hear Earle Birney's name.

I sent a reply back the same day I received her letter thanking her and Mr. Birney for their kind words and the book. I closed the letter off with the poem called 'This one's for you Earle Birney.' I'm sure it's one of those inspirational things that Mr. Birney would appreciate.

At the time these things were happening, I was featured in the London Magazine and on Fanshawe College 6X FM radio talk show, and was doing lectures around town about continuing education and my work in poetry.

When lecturing, the most satisfying feeling I get is from elementary and adult learners who are very inquisitive and can relate to my situation. I'll never forget a lecture I gave at the BLUEPRINTS Center. After I had given my presentation, a young man also by the name of Rob, came up to me and said, "I can relate to you. You know what I'm going through and you really understand me. I'm not a slow learner, I just can't find my doorway". This one hit home. This was the person I was ten years ago, lost with a misguided inner child, looking for help. I sincerely felt for him. It was my hope that I inspired Rob enough to keep on trying despite any obstacles that may lie before him.

Out of all the lectures I have presented, the one I most cherish was the one at St. Marks' Elementary School in London, Ontario. It was through my son Robert, that I was invited to talk to the grade 6/7 class of 94/95, about my poetry. Over the phone I discussed my lecture layout with Robert's teacher, and thought it would be a good time to also talk about the importance of a good education in today's world. I wanted to share my life experience of being a functional illiterate and to tell how illiteracy is becoming a major problem here in Canada. The lecture turned out to be very successful. I received thank you letters, placed in book form, written by the young students. I wrote back to thank the students for their most precious gift and specially dedicated a poem called 'New Promise' just for them.

May 10th, 1995 was another important date for me. I presented a lecture to the O.B.S (Ontario Basic Skills) Western region workshop at the London Delta Armories. This is where all the Western region Colleges came together to gather information on the success of the new pilot project BLUEPRINTS. I was asked to be their special speaker. More than eighty people were invited including some government officials. After my lecture was done, I received a standing ovation.

The lectures had come to an end as I started my Co-op job in June 1995 in a Large Truck manufacturing plant in St. Thomas. I worked in the engineering office doing all sorts of interesting jobs. Most of them had to do with design and AutoCAD drawings. It was my job to set up the CAD system then complete an infrastructure layout of the entire plant on the computer. I still did some writing during the summer, but focused more on my family life.

It was in the early part of August 1995 when I received my last letter. It was from Bonnie Bishop. Bonnie, a Canadian freelance writer, is also an assistant director of the Book Publishers Association of Alberta and received a James Patrick Follingsbee Prize. She also teaches poetry and creative writing in the Liberal Arts Extension Department at the University of Alberta. Bonnie apologized for her late response, but was impressed by my quick advancement in such a short period of time. Bonnie had written that she would never tell anyone whether or not they have the talent to write poetry - that is a personal choice. She gave me a lot of useful hints and other names of contemporary poets that I probably would enjoy reading. She said to become good a writer, I should read a lot of other peoples' works and styles, and my own ideas would grow out of them. Bonnie wished me good luck and encouraged me to continue writing and reading.

Now I felt it was time to see what a big publisher had to say about my work. So on July 10, 1995 I decided to send an unedited manuscript of my poems and biography to McClelland & Stewart. I chose this particular Canadian publishing company because I liked the way they did Earle Birney's book *Last Makings*. Besides, the address was in the back of the book so it made it easier! I sent my (still in the making) manuscript *Songs of the Inner Child*, not expecting it to be published, but hoping for a response that it could be worthy of publication someday.

I received a reply back in September of 1995. This letter made me very nervous. I didn't open the letter for a couple days. I would pick it up then put it away. I knew what was in the letter. I didn't know if I could face the criticism. Finally I opened the envelope. The Publisher's Editorial Assistant thanked me for my submission of the manuscript. She wrote that it had been forwarded to the Poetry Editor and the response time would take up to four months. I didn't know what to make of this. I was surprised it made it past the front desk. At this point, no one knew I had made contact with a publishing company. It would be late January 1996 before I told my wife and then some close friends.

On November 3, 1995 I did my first workshop called 'Returning to Learning' at a one-day conference on literacy. The workshop was a sellout and hailed as a big success. The Mayor of London proclaimed November 3rd Literacy day.

On January 17, 1996, the BLUEPRINTS Advisory Board that I sat on voted to dissolve itself, the concept had proven to be viable and it was time I moved on.

It had been over four months since I heard from McClelland & Stewart and I thought it was time to send them an updated biography by fax. Then on March 6th I received a package from them. However, I had been foretold what to expect. A week before getting the package I took my sister Olga to see a psychic. She had wanted a reading done for some time, so I helped her to seek out a psychic. I went along more out of curiosity, but took along the first letter I received from McClelland & Stewart in September just in case. I waited patiently till she was done. As the psychic walked out of his room I gave him the letter and asked if he could pick up anything from it. He said that I would receive a recommendation soon and that I would be pleased with it. The psychic had said that the editor liked what he had read, but that I should seek out other publishing companies in the United States.

I opened the package and pulled out a two-page letter with the manuscript. The letter was dated February 27, 1996 and started like this:

"Dear Robert Grimminck

I would like to add my congratulations to those of the others whose opinion you have sought about your work. The very existence of your manuscript, that is to say, is a triumph of the spirit. The story of the way you turned your life around is an inspiring story, and I'm glad to have heard it.

I can't state strongly enough my admiration of what you have achieved. At the same time, I must say that the poems, your manuscript, is not as accomplished as a good many of the manuscripts that are sent to me."

The poetry editor went on to say that McClelland & Stewart is held to be the premier house with which to be published in Canada. He wrote that praise is valuable, but criticism is also valuable, 'It provides some resistance against taking the easy way in a poem, a way which is very tempting to take.'

In his criticism he wrote 'I like that nothing is hidden in your poems — I don't like unnecessary obscurity — but I think that the truest poetry is mysterious. Your poems are not pretentious, but they are mostly on the surface and thus more easily exhausted by a reader than they might be.' The Poetry Editor gave me advice on where to find other contemporary poets to read and to discover the spirit of poetry, which occupies many forms, and for me to find out how these forms work. He ended the letter by saying 'Your life has been a poem, and I feel privileged to have read it.'

School had been going very well in the latter part of the school term. I was looking forward to returning to my co-op job at the Freightliner engineering office in St. Thomas for the next eight months. I wasn't expecting any more surprises, but one day a letter arrived in the mail from the Fanshawe College awards department. I was to have an interview with the Awards Selection Committee. They were hoping to learn more about me, and why I felt that I would be a strong candidate for the award. The interview was held on Friday, March 29, 1996.

There were three people on the Awards Selection Committee. They began by asking questions about my chosen career in Industrial Design, my academic level and what was the importance of winning an award. The second part dealt with my personal achievements. I tried to be as humble as I could, but they kept asking for more and the more they heard the more they became inspired.

I received a letter from the Awards Department three weeks later telling me that the committee was very impressed with my qualifications and interview and that I had been chosen for a College wide award for Displayed Academic Achievements & Leadership Qualities.

My second year at Fanshawe just flew by and next thing I knew I was back at the Freightliner Truck Assembly Plant doing my last Co-op term. It was as if I had never left the Engineering department. They were just finishing up a major project when I left to go back to College in September. I felt very comfortable working with this team. They all knew I had had a big struggle in my past, physically, and coping with a learning disorder, but they never gave it a second thought. I earned high respect in what I achieved in my first Co-op term there and they had promised to have me return for my second term.

Sometime in the fall of 1995 I was invited to go to a Design meeting in the conference room at Fanshawe. There were designers from the industry, a speaker from the Toronto Design Exchange, professors from the University of Western Ontario and our own professors from Fanshawe. The one who impressed me the most was Engineering Professor Ralph Buchal. Ralph wanted to have his Engineering students work with Fanshawe design students on major projects but wasn't sure how to achieve the bond between the two establishments. For whatever reasons, this bond idea became a burning desire within me. It wasn't till March when a professor of mine, Guy Gibson, brought it up again that I decided to do something about it. A couple of days later I went and talked to Norm Beddoe, another one of my Design Professors, to see what he thought of my plans.

Norm was very excited about my plan of action and about the idea that the bond between the two establishments be a student driven one. Then I approached the Chairperson Mike Hanwell about my idea.

I met with Mike Hanwell and asked if he had time to hear my idea. I had never formally met Mike so he did not know me from Adam. I told him that I wanted to make a marriage between Fanshawe Design students and U.W.O Engineering students. My plans were to set up a student driven advisory board consisting of four students, two from Fanshawe, two from U.W.O. with Ralph Buchal, Norm Beddoe and Guy Gibson to give guidance and schedule times to work on joint projects. I said I would take full responsibility for whatever happened and that I would be fully committed to the cause. Mike assured me of his full cooperation and support to see that this important link between the students and establishments would happen. I had a private meeting with U.W.O Professor Ralph Buchal on March 22, 1996 to start the ball rolling.

At that point in my life, I had something else on my mind, learning an unpleasant truth. Sometime ago two of my sons got their central auditory processor tested because they were having difficulties in school. After hearing their diagnosis of the auditory disorder I concluded that I also could have the same problem, because I experienced the same symptoms. So I setup an appointment at the same clinic to answer a question that plagued me for years. I recall that day with great clarity, down to the smallest detail.

Arriving at the Auditory Processing clinic just a little past noon on May 13, 1996, I headed to the office on the second floor just above Waldo's restaurant off Piccadilly St. The waiting room reminded me of my basement bedroom from when I was living at my parents' home, but with a very high ceiling. On the four yellow brick walls there hung large prints breaking the straight masonry lines and there was a long narrow window behind the receptionist. The Doctor himself was seated at the receptionist's desk answering incoming calls. He was a tall thin man with a deep and gentle voice. He gave me a form to fill out and moved out of the way so his receptionist could take over.

He led me to a room where he does his auditory testing. It was quite small, but still had the high ceilings. Big paper drawings by children covered the walls. Lying down on a brown leather low profile chair, I noticed big heating ducts running throughout the industrial ceiling. The doctor attached three tiny sensors, one behind each ear and one on top of my head. A small earphone was placed inside my right ear, which made many thudding sounds, then an odd chirp. It was repeated in the left ear. After that test was completed I was seated in a soundproof room with large earphones placed over both ears. I proceeded with four different auditory tests.

The testing was finally completed, and I waited with great anticipation, needing to know the truth, no matter how disheartening it might be. I could tell by the doctor's face that the results were not that great. He was very clear in describing the P300 brainstem visual & auditory response disorder and how my auditory processor worked. I scored very low in most of the tests and in others I hit rock bottom.

The doctor told me that for whatever reasons my auditory processor must have stopped developing when I was very young, because it is that of a five-year-old child. He went on to say I would probably never write or spell properly without the help of someone proofreading and the use of a computerized device. I will always find it a laborious job to read, let alone to read anything between the lines. That explains why I have a hard time understanding deep poetry or the big punch line in a joke. In most cases I miss the meaning of a paragraph and in turn the whole subject matter. He went on to explain that I would continually mix up small words when reading. I shouldn't bother to take notes because I can't write and listen at the same time and would miss most of the important information by doing so. It would be best to voice record important conversations and write them down later. He went on to explain that I must have had a lot of trouble taking notes off the blackboards, because some of the words must have looked confusing. The Doctor said I would continually get confused in a conversation with more than two other people talking at once or in a large group setting. That is because I can't hear the cue signals, which tells me that the conversation has moved on to another subject.

The doctor must have seen how disheartened I was with the findings. In fact I was a little dumbfounded, knowing full well that I did have some kind of disorder. I didn't know whether to cry out of happiness or disappointment. I came to realize how fine the line was that I had crossed over and conquered. I truly believe I create my own reality and within that framework I conquer obstacles that block my creative process. Would my life have been different had I known this information beforehand? Intriguing to say the least.

It had been three months since I started Co-op and one of my projects was to design an ergonomic workstation. Instead I ended up redesigning a very new and exciting department-- not just in spatial planning, but all new designs in equipment such as workstations, jigs, fixtures and clamping devices. I was to draft and develop everything from scratch. If the theory proved itself right, it would become a very cost-effective project the company would adopt to date. With change came some resistance, however the project was to proceed as planned.

On July 9th, Sandi Hennessey, a friend of mine, whom I worked with in the BLUEPRINTS program, left a message at my office to call her. I thought that maybe it had to do with BLUEPRINTS so I returned her call right away. Sandi had asked if I could meet her at a coffee shop somewhere after work. She went on to explain that I was going to be nominated for a national award if I would agree to sign the entry form and give an interview. We set the meeting date for July 11th at 4:30 p.m.

The day I was to meet Sandi, I was going through the motions of the day, but I felt like I was not really there. I couldn't help wondering what this award could possibly be. She did explain it over the phone, but I missed most of what she had said.

Arriving at the coffee shop around 4:25 p.m., I saw Sandi waiting at a table for me. We talked about the BLUEPRINTS program and how the cutbacks have effected the program. The resulting changes were affecting everyone involved in education, and uncertainty hovered like a grey cloud. Soon Sandi's eyes began to light up as she explained that I was being nominated for the National *Flight for Freedom Literacy Award*. It is a distinguished Canadian award, given by Canada Post which recognizes the achievement of an individual who has succeeded in overcoming social or economic barriers caused by the lack of literacy skills.

After the interview Sandi submitted a covering letter and attached a copy of my biography that I've been compiling over the years describing my educational journey. Her last sentence in the covering letter read "Many in our community would like to honor him (Robert) with this submission." I hoped people would realize the honor was all mine - to serve, set an example and encourage the poor souls who need it the most.

July 18, 1996 was the first whole day I took off from work. It was also a very important day. I was to deliver a speech in front of some Deans, Chairpersons and professors of the University of Western Ontario and Fanshawe College at a luncheon held at Fanshawe. My vision of uniting both institutions for a combined program was becoming a reality. I knew the time was ripe for this to happen.

Students and faculty were having to find new alternatives, to share resources, technology, experience and costs, and at the same time keep their own identity, and I had found that alternative in a new and exciting vision. A marriage between the two institutions, conceived in cyberspace and planned through the Internet gave life to this idea. The new concept was called *'HYPERLINKS INTER-DISCIPLINARY STUDENT TEAMS for INNOVATIVE DESIGN'*.

Fanshawe College Industrial Design students would work laterally with UWO Engineering students on major and minor projects, sharing resources, talent and information with future possibilities of encompassing other related programs, such as Marketing, Manufacturing Engineering, etc.

Because of this vision, I established a student-driven advisory board the main objective, of which was to lay out the foundation of the Hyperlinks model and program. Taking the skills I learned from working on the BLUEPRINTS advisory board, I wanted the meeting to be informal and open to any suggestions to make the Hyperlinks viable. The Hyperlinks Advisory board is made up of four students, two from the Fanshawe College Industrial Design program and two from the UWO Engineering program. Professors from both institutions were asked to come aboard to advise, guide and help work out timetables for joint senior level major projects and second year minor projects. As the Hyperlinks model grows, so will the Advisory board to accommodate the interaction of other related programs.

Having a Web-site homepage places us in the vanguard of the New World order. The student will be linked to resources far beyond the reaches of the four stone institutional walls. The Hyperlinks model will become a prototype, a model that will be admired world wide, setting the stage for future models.

The Hyperlinks homepage is an uninhibited place to communicate share and stimulate ideas in a way that will virtually change how we teach education forever. Businesses and Industries will be able to access it and give first hand advice to students on their projects and help steer them in the proper direction.

Students will make links with other students, professors, institutions and maybe entrepreneurs who may very well finance a major project and start a new enterprise. Students would have an excellent jump-start towards their own enterprise. The possibilities are as endless as the human imagination allows.

UWO and F.C. students will work in or as a team having the freedom to choose a responsible Mega project. Each project will be monitored and advised by professors from both faculties. The students will benefit by working in a team, and sharing ideas, knowledge and appreciation of each other's career choices.

I felt the presence of a new milestone just around the corner, but my thoughts were preoccupied in wondering who received the *Flight for Freedom Literacy Award*. September 9th, the date of the announcement, came and went. I had been sitting on needles and pins most of that weekend. It took another week before I figured out that someone else had won. Sandi Hennessey gave me a call at work saying that a good friend of ours, Mary Oliver, received a Flight for Freedom Award. The citation was given by the Governor General, Romeo LeBlanc, in honor of Mary contributing so much towards education. No one more was deserving of that great honor than Mary, who inspired the *poem 'In the Distance.'* The poem *'A Voice'* was also written during this period just as I was turning forty, making me realize that an interest in promoting Adult and continuing education was something I would like to pursue.

The Big Event day was finally here. On September 12, 1996 at 1:00 p.m. Fanshawe College president Dr. Howard Rundle and the University of Western Ontario president Dr. Paul Davenport became joined force in the new program called Hyperlinks. Another fantastic dream had come true. It was through a shared vision ignited by Professor Ralph Buchal that I initiated an opportunity and assembled a dynamic Advisory board, a board which grew and worked very hard to unite Deans, Chairpersons, coordinators, students and two institutional Presidents all from different disciplines to give their commitments publicly in support of the new cooperative program.

My request was simple. Let's all of us work together as teams-- student teams, faculty teams and institutional teams each keeping our own identity, sharing costs, resources, knowledge and commitment, to design a shared program where self-directed students from many different disciplines can work together learning team concepts, designing innovative products, and at the same time appreciating each other's career choices. At the end of the speech I had said "Call me a dreamer, but we just made a very exciting dream come true." The event hit the local news papers, TV and radio stations. The Hyperlinks concept was such a logical fit you wonder why it didn't happen years ago.

I had never thought that my life story could be so overwhelming until I did an interview for Dr. K. Sohail. Sohail and I have become good friends over the past few years and he asked if I would let him interview me to find out more about my personal life. Sohail wanted to know more about my youth, growing up with fourteen brothers and sisters, my relationships with my parents, women I dated and my philosophy on life. He wanted to capture the essence of my life so that it could be added into the book that I was writing and viewed through the eyes of an outsider.

A few weeks later Sohail called and said that he had let some of his friends and colleagues read my manuscript and hear the interview. He said they became overwhelmed and emotional over the interview and asked if they could meet with me. Some of his colleagues wanted to do another interview, with the idea of making a documentary. I agreed to the interview in hopes that it would lead to the promotion of continuing education.

In no time at all, it seemed, I was working on my third year major research project that was to be completed on the day I returned to class. My co-op work term flew by at Freightliner. I finished up most of my big design projects. There were still bugs to be worked out, but it was time to get back to my studies. Leaving Freightliner I felt more confident, having gained life experience working with a team in the engineering office. They must have liked my work because they took me out for a wonderful dinner and gave me a Freightliner transport truck.

On December 12th, I received a College award for Displayed Academic Achievements and Leadership Qualities. It was a certificate and cheque that would cover the cost of my third year term. It was a quiet ceremony with not too many people. Teresa, my five sons, and my sister Olga came to show their support. I try to take my sons to all the College functions, because it is important that they see that education is a lifetime commitment.

The following day I left to spend the weekend with my friend Dr. Sohail to see how his documentary on depression was coming along. He took me out for dinner at the home of his friend Zahid Lodhi, who is a producer for Darvesh Films Canada, a company that produces TV documentaries. The guests at the dinner table asked me a lot of questions and were very inspired. The evening was heart-warming and a lot of fun. I left Dr. Sohail's for home Sunday around noon, not knowing what was to transpire in the following weeks.

Saturday the 21st, I arrived home from a hockey game with my son Mike to find Dr. Sohail's car in my driveway. I hadn't thought he and Ann were arriving until Monday. After the small talk, Sohail unveiled the real reason he had come sooner. He said that Darvesh Films wanted to publish my book and make a TV documentary based on the manuscript that I had written. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I asked him if he was sure about this. Sohail said they felt confident that both the book and documentary would become successful; but how successful, only time would tell. I was in my glory. The manuscript had never been submitted for publication; I had only sought advice on its merit and possibilities of being published. This news from Sohail was all too incredible.

On January 6th, I was back at College. All my research was complete and I was ready to work on Phase Two of the project. My workload was getting heavier, not only from homework but also from Hyperlinks which had been set aside for awhile and had to be brought to the forefront again, My five sons were playing hockey and had had a lot of out of town tournaments at that time of year. The book was going to need some of my attention for editing approval and designing the front and back covers. On top of this I had made the most wonderful discovery.

Now that I could communicate properly through the written word, I made contact with a long-lost relative in Australia, John Grimminck. He linked me to a Dutch cousin of mine, Jan Grim, who had over 500 years of Grimminck history and the names of 6000 people related to me. We have forefathers names as far back as Olivier Grimminck, born in 1540, a church elder of Schore, Belgium and some unsure links as far back as the 1400s.

I was born in Canada and had never known my European roots. It was through an Internet homepage that I had designed which led me to this wonderful discovery. Out of the information that I received about my rich ancestry was folklore about a man called Grim who was the intended executioner of the boy prince Havelok, heir to the Danish throne. It inspired me and kept me up most of the night writing the story of "Grim the Fisherman". Since then, I have written a personal manuscript for my family called *Grimminck: The Last 500 Hundred Years.*

I now had more work on my plate than I could handle and my body was starting to feel the fatigue. There were many times that I tried not to reflect on my back injury, but try telling that to your back. I was feeling a little burnt out and getting sidetracked on almost everything I was doing. There were times I would sit or lie down and think about where all of this was headed. Was I going to find a good job? There were a lot of opportunities, however nothing very concrete. I had always thought I knew where I was headed, but for some reason my confidence level was dropping as I was getting closer to finishing at the end of July. I was finding that my life was full of extremes - I wasn't finding a balance. Many times with people I came in contact I could overwhelm them with my visions and life story. It made me feel isolated in some way.

One day in early February as I was passing the Design office, an instructor, well-known Canadian artist John Brown approached and congratulated me. I thanked him for his hearty handshake and asked him what I had done to deserve his congratulation. John said I had been nominated for all the college-wide awards. He must have seen how embarrassed I was for not knowing this at the time. However, I did know one of my design instructors had sent two nominations on his behalf, one being the President's Prize.

Monday March 17, 1997, how can I describe a day like that? First let me relate what had happened on Friday the 14th. We had had a big winter storm that shut down the hydro from 9:00 in that morning until 10:00 at night. The basement was flooded with six inches of water and most of the basement had been destroyed. My sons Mike and Robert had to sleep upstairs, turning the good living room into a bedroom. This made it almost impossible to do homework, because I was having a hard time focusing on my work. The weekend was total chaos and would stay like that for some weeks to come.

Now comes Monday. This was the day I went for my interview for the President's Award. For the first time in my life, I felt nervous. There were to be three judges. Before I entered the room, two of the three judges mentioned that they had heard positive things about me; the other had not heard of me up to that point.

The interview began with the formal questions that had to be asked; however, they all became more curious about my achievements, so gradually most of the questions ceased to relate to why I was there. But my replies to those areas of inquiry were probably the more influential with regarded to the outcome of the interview. When I left the room, I felt pleased with the process; I might not win, but I had discussed some important ideas with them. This is what I love to do - share my vision with people and, I hope, inspire them. I was too excited to go back to my computer class already in progress, so I had a coffee and a donut to collect my thoughts and put myself back into perspective. I had an ugly mess of a basement to fix.

One of my courses in this last semester dealt with the preparation of a portfolio to present at job interviews. I had kept all of the material that I compiled over the last three years in large cardboard boxes. So I began to sort out what would be good designs and drawings to make up a very professional looking portfolio. In one of the older boxes I came across two letters that I had completely forgotten about. The first one was an invitation from The International Society of Poets inviting me to Washington DC, because I had been nominated for Poet of the Year in 1995.

I was to receive two separate, very special awards for my poetic achievement at a Gala Awards Banquet on August 4th, 1995. I remember that in 1994 I had sent some of my poems for publication in an American poetry book and was pleased to learn that they were going to publish my poems.

Then on April 17th, 1995 the International Society of Poets Selection Committee certified my poems as semi-finalists in their North American Poetry Contest, which led to my nomination of 'Poet of the Year' for 1995. I sent a letter turning down their kind invitation, because I didn't think they were authentic. However after some phone calls and investigation, I did find out that the International Society of Poets did exist and holds a poet's convention each year in the United States.

The second letter I found in the box came from the Oprah Winfrey Show. I remember sending a letter to Oprah telling her about the P300 visual & auditory response disorder and how it imprisoned me most of my life and how I overcame most of these learning obstacles without knowing before hand. I thought it would make a good subject-awareness for her national TV audience. After mailing the letter I thought of it as a big mistake. I recall receiving her return letter, but I put the unopened letter away, eventually forgetting about it, never knowing what it contained. Since re-finding the letter from Oprah, I had it plastic-laminated, sealing it forever.

Perhaps it was an invitation to appear on her show. I'm not sure. But I do recollect not being prepared to tell my life story then on national television, because there were and still are some very strained relationships within my family. I feel sad that the people I cared for most did not offer me the support or even a small congratulation. I wanted to share my accomplishments and celebrate with them, but they chose not to share in my dream. I consider it a great tragedy in my life. My strong feeling about my family of origin gave birth to my poems 'In A House of Many' and 'Personally.'

On April 3rd, 1997 I received a letter from the Fanshawe Awards Department advising me that I was the recipient of the 1997 President's Award. I would receive one of the College's most prestigious awards from the President himself Dr. Howard Rundle at the fall graduation ceremony on November 7th, 1997.

A great milestone in my life that I had so longed for was arriving with such pomp and ceremony. I really did dream a different dream and made it come true. My incredible journey and achievements stand on their own. If you really believe in yourself, you have the power within to change your reality, should you so desire. I am the living proof of that dream!

On occasion people have asked, "Wouldn't you like to confront some of your old school teachers, who could have helped, but instead just passed you off as a slow learner?" Sometimes I have reflected on that question and have come to terms with it. I realize that I had to stop blaming people and the system for all of my problems—to take the responsibility to further myself academically and keep moving forward. But you know the saying 'what goes around comes around.' Well, this could not have been more true than at a lecture I did at the London and Middlesex County Separate School Board. Just before I got up to deliver my speech, I had noticed that my principal from elementary school was there. He hadn't changed a bit, other than a little grey in his hair. My mother did a lot of fund raising for him at one time, so he knew me well. After I finished my short lecture a parent got up and expressed her concern over the literacy problem where her children attended school.

The mother was hoping the School Board would exchange the vice-principal post for a desperately needed resource teacher to help with the literacy problems. My former principal was listening as she was talking about his school. How ironic, I thought. With me being there talking about my past illiteracy and how it affected my life, this principal was seeing his past and his future at the same time. When the concerned parent had finished speaking, the principal took off like a flash. Having done that lecture, with my old principal being more symbolic of my past teachers, I realized that my life had come full circle. It meant I could close that chapter of my childhood and look toward the future knowing I did give it my best.

My Work in Poetry

Many of my poems are written from within, from my inner child, with my creative emotions and they reveal how I perceive life around me. When you read the poems, read them slowly and with an open mind. Many of my poems reflect life, death, love, sadness and happiness.

Everything is equal in my circle of thoughts, from a blade of twitch grass to the great planets that decorate our night skies.

As a spiritual human I awake to 'live life' in many different ways and embrace death every night like a long lost friend. I truly believe we as individual humans, spiritually create our own reality, in a reality dream that we all share in together.

Life has many choices and probabilities to chose from. Each second, with every breath I take, I create my own reality. The God force in me is a creative and continuous God, who is with me as a co-creator. My God has no gender and is many times referred to as ALL THAT THERE IS.

Some of my poems are dedicated to people or events that have inspired them; however, for most of the poems, they just push their way through to be born. Why this wonderful gift is happening to me, I'm not sure. But I am grateful that it is and hope it will never stop, but will blossom into a mosaic of colorful thoughts, filling my consciousness with ALL THAT THERE IS.

Enjoy the poems for what they are.

Robert Grimminck

I Once Grew A Garden

(The World Family Poem)

I once grew a garden,
planted it with loving care.
it fed my whole family,
with some seeds left over to share.

I gave some seeds
to my friends and neighbors,
which they planted with loving care.
it fed their whole families,
with some seeds left over,
so they also began to share.

I once grew a garden,
planted it with loving care.
now there's no more hunger,
because we all learned how to share.

Here I Stand

Here I stand at the edge of my life,
with my eyes closed, I look around,
and smell the fragrance of time,
then kiss the morning that greets me.

I sing in harmony with All That There Is,
and cry when I feel no more.
I will inhale what is to be,
and laugh at what was.

My nights turn into a play-ground,
where my existence is joyous of being,
in love with life's creation-
of me.

At Last

At last the journey of this long day has passed
and I lay my tired body down to rest
in the comforts of what little belongings I do possess
in truth I do not know where I shall go
when my eyes close and I fall into a deep slumber
perhaps a rehearsal for my inevitable death
or maybe my awakening from it.

I Quench

(For June Callwood)

The fragrance of the morning flowers
bloom ideas of great promise it seems
as I drink from these pools of thoughts
they ripple with such excitement
 through out my mind
 but like the water that flows
 through my crooked fingers
 only the last drop is captured
 by my parched lips
 trying to quench
 my great thirst

Untitled

The time before me
has just become my present,
and is now entering my past.

I Wonder.....Ponder

I hear the rain spitting against the single panes of glass,
running down loosening the white scabbed skin
which has lifted from the weather beaten timber
the sashes rattle as the boisterous thunder speaks out.
rain ticking, ticking the loose panes,
the wind whistling, whispering the mood I feel.
lightning flashes strange figures,
leaving me in darkness momentarily,
but I soon see again and I wonder.....ponder.
I move my face close to the tattered old sash,
feeling the coolness of the glass upon my cheek,
smelling the decay coming from the soft draft flowing
from between the wet timber
and loose pieces of broken glass as I look out,
watching the bright flashes lighten up the dream like landscape
and I wonder..... ponder.
the tree branches scratch and scrape
like the arms of a screaming sailor
trying to save himself from the drowning waters,
scratching, scraping for his last earthly breath
as I sit there and wonder.....ponder.
the loud silence comforts me
as the street light illuminates my face
while rippling rain shadows play upon my complexion,
my mood and I wonder why I even ponder.

Untitled

Many lies are spoken,
with the intent of doing good,
but most fall short of worthiness.

Oh Dear God

Oh dear God, will you forgive me
if it is I who is in the wrong
for you are not the same almighty
as the one my fellowship believes
you have become a warm breeze
which flows over the lands of time
coming through my back door
whispering different truths
arousing my contemplation
awakening my curiosity
I was a pure raindrop
that fell from the heavens
trickling into a winding river
flowing into an sea of mixed truths
my body is the mother earth walking about
guided by my curious being
forgetting my purpose
I do her no justice
now All That There Is
has fulfilled my soul
and we have become
one in love
one in faith
one in humility
I fear not of you
I have found love, I always had faith
and my humility will return me to my true source.

Prisoner to Myself

Trapped in chemical clothing I am a prisoner to myself.
I know of great truths and wisdom of old,
but I cannot speak or write the truths in the sands of time
for my lineage and me to recognize that I was here before.
Was it God who lost the key to my prison door,
or was it my indulging sins of the past that locked them.
I write verses on these godforsaken dim walls,
and stare out from the invisible prison bars
weeping in silence
fearing no one will hear me.

Loneliness

dark shadows
of loneliness
lurk
in the shade
of my existence
haunting sounds
whisper
familiar echos
which i am shackled to
like a bird
with a string tied to its foot
it can fly
but it's not free
i am not
a sovereign
to this life
of a ponderous burden
were the dark shadows
will swallow
the shade
of my existence
and summons
my fate

The Bay of Agony

The waters are calm across the bay of agony
as the harvest moon rises
with a movement I had never seemed to observe before
I search the twilight sky for some - thing
listening to my chanting friends
a soft white mist blankets the bog
gentle breezes caress my existence
my contemplation
setting me free
from the burdens of life

Expression

Creativity is expression of the Soul,
Expression is freedom of the mind.
Be free to express your creativity,
It's our Soul purpose in life.

Come and Celebrate

Come, and celebrate life with me.
I am, but only a part of all things that exist,
in this beautiful circumstance I call life.
I see, and feel things that your senses dismiss,
and it makes me humble to know,
what very little wisdom I do possess.
I am part of the fabric of All That There Is,
from which I am woven
I came to celebrate life,
and to create love.
come, and celebrate
life with me.

Am Nothing More

I am nothing more than a soul,
trapped in chemical clothing,
expressing my creativity,
outward into a reality dream,
that we all share together.

I Was Just Thinking

I was just thinking,
and I gave it a lot of thought,
it was something I've always sought,
but for some reason, now I forgot
what I was thinking.

Believe

(For the Graduating Class of 1994,
Centre For Lifelong Learning)

I cry, I weep,
sometimes before I sleep,
feeling empty, a void,
in a desolate place.
I want to wake, but cannot,
a flower trying to grow,
in whispers of moon light.
how could I forsake,
myself like this.
one day I began to believe,
and a tiny light shone within me.
I felt a glimmer of hope,
maybe there's more to me.
strength, removed the heavy chains of ignorance
knowledge, nurtured and fed me from her bosom
willpower, set my soul a flight
I began to see the light.
the long sleepy winter changed into spring,
soon green buds began to bloom,
and I blossomed within.

Sometimes

(For Janet Frame)

Sometimes all we have to do,
is dream a different dream,
and really believe,
it will come true.

I Would Like To

I would like to fly high, way up high.
not through the sky though,
but between a dimension,
where time does not exist,
so I can free my burden,
of this parasite flesh,
which seeks the affection,
that drags me down,
into the pits of my hell.
for my thoughts dispute what they hear,
and I cannot recognize the truths,
because my senses deceive the ego,
and it makes me wonder,
who really is the fool.

I Dreamt A Different Dream

(To My Unknown Friends with AIDS)

I dreamt a different dream than you,
and danced with all the wild flowers.

I sang with the blue moon,
and wet the dry waters,
making my dream come true.
now I have the kiss of death
because I dreamt a different dream,
and now I won't be dying,
in loving arms like you.

New Promise

As I rise with the new morning dew
I shall celebrate every
precious moment
I inherit with you
because with each new second
comes a new promise
in everything we do

This poem was written especially for Mrs. Ann Marie Bridgman and her 1995 Grade 6/7 class, St. Mark's School, London, Ontario: Stephanie Morrissey, Andrew Paterson, Dennis Varillas, Stephanie DelVasto, Matt Luther, Melissa Milne, Alex Nirta, Matt Weiler, Robert Deitz, Theren Poulin, Derek Gignac, Stephanie Van de Ven, Kelly Creighton, Robert Grimminck Jr, Vicki Beaudin, Kelly Hughes, Nathan Englbreth, Ricardo Di Ciocco, Christine Johnson, Mike McLaughlin, Michael Norris, Shawn Dantzer, and Elizabeth Sousa.

This one's for you, Earle Birney

My thoughts lie beside you
upon the bed where you now rest.
they are there to comfort
and to make you feel
that you are not alone.
they're like children playing
in the dust of your dreams,
only to hide when the ego rises
to greet the new morning dew.

When I Was Young

When I was young
the days
were imperialistic
like the times
Dogma was the rule
and God was feared
life was simple then
and so was I

Forsaken

Gentle breezes
cool the midnight air
ghostly smoke
slowly twisting turning
the smell of hard wood burning
filling the somber sky
crickets creaking
frogs croaking
early morning dew
wets the long grass
whereupon I chew
the midnight sun
moves slowly on by
as I lay staring
at the star filled sky
and wonder why
starry, starry night
take my soul aflight
to rise with
the harvest moon
tonight
but to the
morning blossoms
I shall waken
some how
still to feel
forsaken.

Say NO My Sons & Daughters

(I cry for Yugoslavia)

Say NO
my sons and daughters
say NO
for they cannot do battle
if all say NO

Go home young soldiers
go take care of the ones you love
don't fall into the graves
of others' false ideals
because the dirt
will still accept you
as its own
and the turkey buzzards
will pick at your flesh
so its babes will not go hungry
the worms and maggots
will slip and slide
in and out of your bloated holy corpses
filling their hungry bellies with
your rotten flesh
with not even a concern whose
sons or daughters you were.
Your frozen stares will capture
the last pain of this eternal hell
eyes drying out
sunken in the blackened wells
of your sunken sockets
casting your last fears
fingers clenching
arm reaching out
as you gasped
for your last
earthly breath
say No
my sons and daughters
say No
for they cannot do battle
if all say
NO

Dust in the Wind

The only things we take with us
when it is all said and done
is the love, knowledge and memories
that we all shared in this dream we call reality
all else is left behind
to become dust in the wind

Silence Is My Lover

Silence is my lover tonight
pouring all around me
awaken to a space that
some how feels familiar
an old acquaintance
a belonging perhaps
lingering
like the fragrance of a
scarlet honeysuckle blossom
then vanishing into a passing
breeze of sweet dreams

You'll Always Be My Lover

You'll always be my lover
in the midnight sun
lost in my spell
your burdens
slipping away
gentle moves
soft touches
seeking love in my eyes
I'm your lover tonight
and you'll always
become my
morning light

Consciousness

Such a mysterious gift
this thing called consciousness
for I do not know of its true purpose
or what it really is
residing with in my chemical clothing
moving about with me
in time and space

Creating thoughts and images
bubbling up playing
with all of my emotions
experiencing such a brilliance
of self-awareness
making me long for
who truly I am

Who would have given
such a mysterious gift
to me
and never become known
leaving me so perplexed

To the End I Wander

To the end I wander
with more questions
than answers
I cannot look back
because there's
nothing
to look back to
tired, disheartened
having so many
false hopes
failed dreams
broken promises
yet I will not succumb
to my fears
and wipe
away the tears
like my past
and journey on
bravely

Last of the Autumn Flowers

I rush out to touch and smell
the last of the autumn flowers
knowing they will soon be gone
colored leaves begin to descend
from young and old trees alike
 painting a mood
 a small reminder
 of what is to come
cooler breezes caress
my engrossed thoughts
and less demanding
are the shorter days
but in the near distance
change draws nearer
which I must accept
knowing there is no
 other alternative

On The White Landscape Of Cold

On the white landscape of cold
stand leftover corn stalks
with their slim smooth trunks
and long dried out leaves,
flapping, twisting and bending
with the weight of its young
which are being pecked and eaten
by the hungry ravens and rodents
In the distance a wall of dark forest
reaches grandly to a sky of white
huge snow flakes slowly
falling, twisting, turning
gently blanketing the tired old ground
lonely sounds of winter echo
an unforgiving defeat, death
to the weak and hungry
cat-tails sway to and fro
brown reeds bend and break
by an undecided whirlwind caught
in the sleepy hollow of a frozen pond
A snowy white owl waits silently
perched on a grey split cedar post
searching for a live warm morsel
succoring among the dry yellow grasses
lining the fence along its edge
Night descends quickly
as the freezing north winds
keep on blowing, blowing
picking up the soft white powder
off the frosty turf
sending it straight up
seizing the view, the air
loneliness spreads quietly
as the midnight sun slowly
rises above the white landscape of cold

Absorb Yourself

Absorb yourself
in this earthly delight
I too am an atom
in this vast universe
and what I perceive as big
is small
and what is minute
is infinite
like words of wisdom

I lay unclad
in Walt's leaves of grass
and I assume
what he assumed
it's only been a hundred years
since his demise
and no one has forgotten

I am now of middle age
with some grey to my liking
I have spoken many wise words
but not one of them being heard
perhaps there is nothing to listen to

The hour that I shall depart
mourn for your own fears
tenderly I will be absorbed
not letting anyone
or anything go hungry
my songs are for the hearts and minds
and my corpse is for the new
nothing will be wasted
more likely forgotten

Always Remember
(Cathy Cook)

Always remember
your hands made this world,
but your true heart makes it
a better place to live

Personally

personally
I
will never feel
successful
because
I
will never receive
approval
from the ones
I
want to
hear it from
the most

Fear

When love is replaced by fear,
it turns into lumps of hate,
like a shiny piece of black coal,
fuelling the hell fires
of your imagination.

Love Hate

Lips speak of hatred more than of love.
it is easier to hate than to love.
it is easy to love hate,
but I'd rather choose love,
because love seems harder to attain.

All of My Life

All of my life
I've been searching
for answers to my questions
all of my life
there's so much to remember
so much I wanted to say
all of my life
I've been hurting
not wanting to look back
all of my life
not knowing which way to go
what to do
what to say
all of my life
I'll keep on searching
all of my life

I Sing to Myself

I sing to myself
many mornings
having woken up
from my playground
languished
the perfume
of thunder storms
weigh heavy
the burdens of literature
weigh heavy
the songs of myself
dance about freely

I inhale them

absorb them

express them

you hear them

absorb them

perceive them
I invite the songs
as life has invited me
shall no one
listen
I sing to myself

All Must Succumb

All the leaves are lying on the ground
some covered with snow
others wet
many just blowing around
lost not knowing where they are going
a drop of water
gently falls
from the end
of a frail branch
all succumbs to the ground
there is no argument
no regret
all must succumb

Cold White Plumes Softly Fall

As the cold white plumes softly fall
I think about the days gone by
colored leaves, a warm breeze
that kindles my thoughts
of not so long ago
I awake to a new season
as to a new life
knowing it
will change like
day to night
tender is the ground
it is my future
made by the past
but, for now I will dance
because that's what I know best
before the cold white plumes
cover me up at last

Life Without Purpose

Do I go through life without purpose,
knowing a leech is of greater significance to its environment.
being aware of my reality, and having methodical reasoning,
have I no shame of my destructive existence,
being conscious of a greater love.
I rather assume it's my right,
than a privilege to love.
even though I rape,
all there is of it,
and think
nothing
of it.

If I Am To Exist

(Goodwill Society)

if I am to exist
I must have a purpose
in life
if there is no purpose
why bother
to exist

A Reflection of What I Am

Staring into the window I bear witness
to a reflection of what I am
I do not know of a greater truth
than the one I am now living
and cannot silence my gratefulness
yet I feel a pity and sorrow
for people who have not realized this
I am not a rich person, in a monetary sense
nor am I a person of great power and influence
but I do have the ability to be creative
and to appreciate what has been created
in this way I remain a simple person of great stature.
Just the fact alone, that we exist and have this ability
to create and to be creative in our own reality within other realities
is a magnificent gift
misunderstood by many.

Empty

The nights have become

my enemy

all I do is toss and turn
night shadows flirt
with my ludicrous dreams
and the water taps

drip

drip

drip

I wrestle with my sheets
my playground is empty
and so is my heart

In The Distance

(Mary Oliver)

In the distance
I heard a soft cry
as I came closer
the cries became
louder and louder
millions of people
dying of thirst

I showed them how
to build simple machines
purifying their own
sweat and tears
to quench their thirst

Upon leaving
I heard singing and laughter
as I went further and further
the voices softened
all I could hear
was the sweet sound of joy
in the distance

Kiss Me

Kiss me
kiss me
tell me that you'll always
love me
love me
hold me
hold me
now and
forever
forever
touch me
touch me
say you'll always be
near me
near me
kiss me
love me
tell me
you'll always
be mine
hold me
touch me
say you'll always
love me
love me
now and
forever
forever
love me

Prayer

As the light
ebbs
with the evening
darkness
softly
I sing
grandeur is my
prayer
humble
is my request
magnificence is my
dream
small
is my faith
modest is my
selfishness
forgiveness is my
saving grace
softly
I sing
as the darkness
ebbs
with the morning
light

A Voice

(National Flight for Freedom Achievement Award)

The cries of millions reach out
and I have become their voice
I stand literally naked
in front of the world
for all to see
to be judged
perhaps mocked
to tell my most secret
secrets
a silent soldier
fighting a silent war
where the pen
is mightier
than the sword

Sentimental Drunk

I can feel the dark rum
and it makes me sentimental
for reasons
I do not wish to share

I am in a bliss of not caring
and surpass the stage of
SO WHAT

cherished are the happy memories
of the past
but glad are the thoughts of new

I do not cling to my old clothing
but discard it like my past

I live for the future
in fact
I hunger for it

I've forgotten all the whispers
of gossip,
but I remember the
whisperer
Oh the pains of dark rum
are the least of my pangs

I Search My Heart

I search my heart
For something
that was never shown
it weighs so heavy
on my mind and soul
was I never given
this gift
of forgiveness
I will keep searching
amongst the dark forest
of hurt
where the leaves of loneliness
cover its path
perhaps someone
will show me
the way
towards those peaceful shores
where forgiveness flows like a river
a place were I can
wash
my tartan soul
refresh
my cloudy mind
cleanse
all my hurt
and quench
the thirst of others

Forgiveness

In my lonely heart
I have not found
forgiveness
and I realize she is my only
saving grace
loneliness is my comfort
I know her best
she has always been there
for me
however
should I ever leave her
she would never
forgive me

I Am

I
am
a
simple person
with
a
simple dream
a
simple hope
a
simple prayer
sometimes all we have to do
is dream a different dream
and really believe
it will come true

I Tried My Best

(Tim Hickman)

I awaken,
knowing another night
I sleep,
knowing another day
when both shall end
I know,
I tried my best

Dreams

If I did not believe in my dreams
hope would never have meaning and
small wishes would never come true
dreams are my creative expression
my colored paint palate
of who I really am
I paint my reality
with exhilarating strokes
exciting colors
how can I not follow
my hopes
my wishes
my dreams
expression
of myself

Spring

A warm breath of white mist,
sets upon the sleepy terrain,
caressing foothills, and
snow covered ploughed fields.

waves of dark soil,
peek through the snow,
like a frozen ebb.

dark skeleton trees,
touch the virgin mist,
waiting to be aroused,
from a long winter's nap.

soon islands of brown grass,
will breathe again among,
the receding sea of snow.

a grey cedar, split rail fence,
covered in soft green moss,
still standing in a frozen white surf,

making a perfect perch,
for a young robin's love chirp.

Down By The Pond

Down by pond, where we used to go,
the air was hot and muggy,
and the carmine sun was setting low,

tall cattails lined part of the water's edge,
moving back and forth, to and fro,
with scarlet red wings swaying,
and bullfrogs bellowing below.

we'd strip off our clothes in a flash,
jumping in naked, with a big splash,
making the sunset dance upon,
the water's rippling skin.

our little butts popping up and down,
holding our breath under water.
neither one of us was very honest,
when it came to counting who held it the longest.

swimming back to the mucky shore,
sinking our feet in the grey silky mud,
making it squeeze through our wrinkled toes.

helicopter dragon flies would hurry by.
slapping hungry mosquitoes again and again
we'd pull off big fat blood suckers,
while cow pie flies would bite our skin.

night was falling, time to get dressed,
a cool white mist was settling in low.
we left looking more of a mess,
than when we came down
by the pond, where we used to go.

This Old Sweater of Mine

This old sweater of mine,
is stretched and grey,
with droopy pockets,
somewhat frayed,
just one button left,
all the rest gave way.

made with questionable virgin wool,
and hangs almost to knee length,
with a hole, here and there,
probably fed a mouse or two,
but still keeps me warm,
on those cold wintry days.

sure smells nice and cozy,
never lets out the heat,
certainly would be hard,
to throw it out,
besides, the mice,
wouldn't have a thing
to eat.

I Once Met a Teacher

(For Sam Morrison)

I once met a teacher,
who asked what I really thought.
I was surprised to hear this mentioned,
because at one time, I didn't think a teacher
really cared what I thought.

So I hemmed and hawed,
thinking what to say.
I'll use intellectual sentences,
something profound, or inspiring,
it had to be intelligent, in some way.

I got all geared up, and ready to speak,
this is my chance to say what I really sought.
out came the words, all so messed up.
how embarrassing, what an idiot, I thought.

"Don't feel all bummed out" the teacher said,
"be yourself, and let it come from the heart,
because I did the same thing a lot."
I once met a teacher
who really cared what I thought.

Today I Had A Dream

Today I had a dream, and dreamt of a time
when I was camping with dad in my younger days
he told me scary stories of long ago,
by a camp fire as the sun was setting low.

Today I had a dream, and dreamt of a time
when Mom took my tiny hands,
and showed me how to pray,
that the good Lord kept me another day.

Today I had a dream, and dreamt of a time
when I would cry in the night,
you would come in and hold me snug,
telling me everything is going to be all right.

Today I had a dream, and dreamt of a time,
when we all worked together,
helping those who need it the most,
making their lives seemed a little better,

Today I had a dream, and I dreamt of a time,
when we'd share in all the joy and sorrow,
where love was never hard to find,
dreaming of a better tomorrow.

We Were At One Time, One

(For My Mom, Geertruida Grimminck-Folker)

We were at one time , One
when I could hear your laughter,
and felt all your pain.
you would rub your tummy,
and whisper different names.

feeding me from your tender breast,
humming songs, telling little stories,
rocking yourself sound asleep,
I never did give you much rest.

school was hard on both of us,
I never did see it through.
you never did let me know,
how I disappointed you.

jobs were easy to come by,
and the money wasn't bad.
I married a fine girl,
she reminds me of you.

many years have gone past,
and you have come to rest.
I so try to remember,
just the way you were,

we were at one time, One
and I won't forget your love,
because I share it with my kids.

My Grampa Dad

(For My Dad, Ferdinand Grimminck)

Smiling eyes of blue,
softly saying, I love you.
wispy hair so white, tiny fingers,
holding on to it so tight.

defenseless in arms so strong,
feeling every flex of muscle, cuddly warm.
biting and gnawing little toes so tender,
rubbing them against his unshaven whiskers,
making me squabble, loves the smell,
of his tiny toddle.

coarse and salty his baby finger was,
soothing soft pink gums,
from teething pains,
through nights so long.
Grampa dad really did,
give it his all.

I am an offspring from your lust and ignorance,
did you not think, when I was conceived,
how wide the bay would be,
between you and me.

you soured my youthfulness,
like an apple so green.
having nothing in common,
you were old and decrepit to me.
your death, came at the worst of times,
in my shameless teenage rebellion,
leaving me without a reason,
Why?

Songs of the Inner Child

Through loneliness
God made a man
but then man became lonesome
so with all of God's creative perfection
made a woman equal to man
now the man and woman had each other
but then God became lonely once again
so through God's almighty wisdom
made Love
and became the Child
and called it Hope

The Inner Child

(For Karl Sotiriou)

Softly I speak out
to let you know
that I am always here
in your heart & soul
I am
your truth
your innocence
your tears
your joy
I am
pure love
I am you

Passion

Your hair softly flows through my soothing fingers,
as moonbeams gently touch your soft skin.
my body begins to melt, as your lips began to linger,
waiting to fulfill my hunger, finding my sin.

hush my love, show me your desires,
let our bodies speak what words cannot recite,
lighting our imaginations on fire.
come lie beside me, set my soul aflight.

Like the cooing of the mourning dove,
your passion runs like a river into the sea,
leaving me to drown in your ocean of love.
caress my body, ease my mind, set me free.

I am engulfed in your warmth and grace,
a day without your love, I could never face.

Jealousy

My jealousy blisters like paint,
on a sun burnt wall,
spilling over into every pore,
of my existence,
feeding my hunger with black rage,
making it bubble up like hot oil,
waiting to spew all over,
hoping to catch someone in my wrath,
not looking for forgiveness,
or to forgive,
it is my hate,
in all of its
glorious glory.

Pale Blue Linen

A cool breeze blows in the open windows
long curtains flow with dance
your perfume overtakes my senses
an innovation perhaps
your body draped in pale blue linen
creases softly flowing in the dim light
initializing is the mood
quiet is the breeze
as it sweeps over
your beautifully lit form
I swell with passion, desire
fragile is my touch
warm is my breath
like the breeze
a gentle tease
to awaken the love
draped in pale blue linen

Whisper

She whispers

softly

her breath is warm

comforting

do I respond

invite

she waits

The Pleasures of Body Beautiful

Know thy self, express thy self, find pleasure in thy self
Love thy self so thou can love another
With the pleasures of body beautiful
Make gestures that will please thy senses
Confuse thy thoughts in believing it is sin
making thy blood flow more defiantly to fulfill thy sin
Thy body is a wanting body
Thy body is a sensual body
Thy body is a beautiful body
Excite thy pleasures like the tides that caress the shore
What thou shall perceive as good
Will be good in the midst of thy body
Feel thou cool breaths that flow over thy gentle curves
As thy soft warm lips touch
Stimulating thy succulent skin
Stirring, arousing thy seductive mood
Pleading for thy pleasures
The Excitement, the pure ecstasy
Love thy self, know thy self, express thy self
Awaken thy body beautiful

Body Beautiful

Swimming in the river of life
three entities create one
every atom and molecule
growing, uniting with each other
conscious of their place in body beautiful
a constant birth and death cycle
of cells gathering in rhythm and harmony
creating, forming mother earth
into becoming body beautiful
waiting for the hierarchy to
guide the body of walking molecules
wrapped in a sensual skin
with soft flowing curves
to stimulate another walking physique
into seeing a beautiful body
only to renew this game
of creation.

I Myself

I am myself, and always will be.
My body will become the forest green,
And the birds that fly so free.
For they cannot have my soul,
Because it is me.

I Shall Celebrate Every Precious Moment

(In memory of my inspiration Walt Whitman)

As long as the fountain of inspiration continues to saturate
and inspire my thoughts as a loving human being,
I shall celebrate every precious moment that I inherit in this life.

as an instrument of something much greater,
I shall inscribe my contemplation
about life's and death's interweaving
of the psyche and of the flesh becoming one entity,
sharing in a reality dream
which we all occupy as co-creators.

I shall love the water that refreshes and cleanses my body,
it is part of me
I shall love the stone that crushes wheat for my daily bread,
it is part of me
I shall love the ground that I walk on,
it is part of me
I shall love the plant that nourishes my body,
it is part of me
I shall love all creatures of the earth,
they are a part of me
for their flesh has fed me and their skins have kept me warm
their sacrifice has been greater than mine
but to the earth we all shall return
to renew the cycle of life and to become
one in water, one in stone, one in dirt, one in plant,
one in creature, one in you
it will be I that will sacrifice my life to feed and keep you warm
it will be I that will grow out of the dirt to nourish your body
it will be I that you will walk upon
it will be I that will crush your wheat for your daily bread
it will be I that will refresh and cleanse your body
for you are what I am in reality
but not in vitality.

My Corpse

My corpse kisses the earth,
like a long lost friend.
the grass and flowers will bloom
from me once again.
the cows and sows will feed,
from these meadows so green,
your tongues rejoicing in the taste,
of their flesh so warm,
not knowing my corpse,
had rotted just below.

Comfort Me

Death oh death comfort me,
living has become my sentence.
death oh death comfort me,
for only you are certain.

I Fear Dying Naked

I came into this world
to impregnate it
with my creativity
conceived into a reality
of failed dreams
and false hopes
I must learn
Love conquers all
and forgiveness
is only a
heart beat away
I was born naked
a parasite for

Learning

Creating

Knowing

Loving

Forgiving

I fear dying
Naked

Breathless Souls

I hear the whispers of my forebears
Breathless souls
in the sound of today's Celtic music
feeling their soft symphonic breeze
which had given
them life
me life
they are my heroes of old
to whom I give thanks

their unsung songs saturate
my thoughts
tears, smiles
and triumphs
life has not betrayed
nor forgotten them

we are descendents
of the first
now a garden
of dreamers
of the
last

Farewell

Farewell my comrades,
I did enjoy the stay.
it was nice knowing you all,
but my journey must
end this way.

I leave content knowing
I learned a lot along the way.
soon I will breathe my last,
only to whisper your name.

call my friends when I pass,
but do not cry or weep,
because in the end,
we'll all meet,
again.

A Christmas Morning

One winter Christmas morning a cold wind was whistling through the attic bedroom window sashes, forming a thick layer of ice on the single panes of glass. The ice had started to melt and dripped down on the head of my bed. I was curled up in a warm feather tick like a baby squirrel hibernating for the winter. Hearing a constant dripping sound, I woke out of a sound sleep. I stuck my head out of the damp comforter like a turtle slowly exiting its shell. A big drop of water hit me in the eye, and it ran down the side of my nose into a nostril then onto my lips leaving a very unwanted tickle. My face, and nose could sense the cold musty air filled with a stench of rotten eggs, thanks to my six older brothers, who made it their business to be awakened to the real world in this manner.

I looked around the open bedroom that was set up like an army barracks. Four nephews were lying in sleeping bags on the floor beside their favorite uncles, like dogs ready to please their masters. I stuffed my head back under the wet feather tick suddenly realizing the excitement of this special morning. I decided to get out of bed. Placing my warm feet on the cold floor, how I wished I'd left my socks on. Now that the pressure was building on my bladder, I had to move fast.

Trying not to touch the cold floor, I jumped from one sleeping bag to the next, only to hit one of my nephews in the face. I thought to myself, if Fred had been lying beside my bed this would not have happened to him. He never woke up. Actually I never remember him ever being awake, when he was awake. Quickly I opened the door that leads to the downstairs. Feeling a warm breeze pass by, I could smell hardwood burning in the wood stove in the living room. Hearing somebody else getting up, I ran downstairs into the washroom first.

The smell in the big kitchen was very appetizing-- apple pancakes, homemade bread, eggs, bacon, and fresh coffee. Out of the eight sisters, three were up helping Mom set the table for fifteen people. This morning we had to take different turns eating breakfast, but for supper another table would be set up so everyone could enjoy the Christmas feast Mom had been preparing for days. "Good-morning, Robby" Mom said placing my head against her large breast that had fed all fifteen of us at one time or other.

She was large, of medium height, a Dutch woman with dark hair done in a bun, with two pearly hair combs holding it all together. Her skin was soft without fault. Her nice dark brown eyes could see right through me. She was somewhat domineering, but had a loving personality like a mother wolf caring over her cubs, a real fighter. "Merry Christmas! Did you have a goodnight's sleep?" She said in her Dutch accent. "Did Santa come last night?" I asked. "Go see." And with that I ran to the living room.

I found myself lost in Christmas, decorated in all of its splendor, with mistletoe, holly, and the real smell of pine. The Christmas tree stood tall and wide with homemade decorations of popcorn strings, paper angles, dried apple slices, lights, glass birds, and colored balls made out of little squared mirror pieces. The presents stood out like a city with its high-rises covered in different colored Christmas paper. I knew my gifts were there, but where? I wouldn't find out until everyone had finished breakfast. Finding my Christmas stocking I dumped it all out on the throw rug to find matchbox cars, assorted candy, salted licorice, and no black coal, to my relief.

Back in the kitchen my oldest brother in-law was absorbed in a conversation about the November assassination of President Kennedy. I remember when the news flash came across the black and white TV. Mom started to cry, and everyone was bewildered for some time.

Returning to my thoughts to the present and the better part of the day I sat down beside my Dad for breakfast. He was a handsome, white haired, sky blue eyed, broad shouldered man. Fifty-one years my senior. He had lots of charm and character but ruled with an iron fist. He spoke with a heavy Dutch accent, but never babbled, always getting his point across.

Dad would set out his shaving gear after he had eaten, which became tradition when the grandchildren came visiting. The kids would gather around at the big oak oval table; little hands and rosy red, chubby cheeked, faces perched on the table edge as they watched Granddad brush on the thick soapy lather on his burly face. Round and round, up and down the brush would go, inducing in their little minds a hypnotic trance. Then all of a sudden his lather brush would soap the closest little snout. They would run around frantically screaming, then Dad would chase them around the table. I'd watch wishing I were his grandson rather than his son.

Breakfast was over, and the moment had arrived. I scurried to the living room by the warm wood stove, and staked out my territory, waiting eagerly for my name to be called. Dad's favorite Dutch Christmas carols were playing in an old suitcase record player. The older girls and most of the younger kids sat in front of the tree, just mesmerized by it all.

As materialistic as it may have seemed, to a kid this was the big payoff. I knew in my heart that most of the gifts were handmade. There was not much money when they had to feed, and clothe a big family, but there were a lot of talented hands. It was the love and hard work that went into the gifts that made them special, and more importantly it was, if only for that one moment in time, that they were thinking about me as a good and worthy son. It was all of this, and more that made Christmas morning special for me.

A Source of Inspiration

Robert Grimminck has always been a source of inspiration for me. Even in my first meeting with him I was impressed by his gentle, kind and generous nature. He radiated peacefulness and tranquility. As time passed the special bond between us became stronger. After his accident I was amazed that rather than developing a pessimistic attitude towards life, he used that crisis as an opportunity to grow. He not only got in touch with the spiritual, artistic and creative part of his personality, but also went back to school and discovered the power of words. When I read his poems for the first time I was quite touched. For a person who was labeled a slow learner all his life, creating such beautiful poetry was nothing less than a miracle. I feel quite proud of his accomplishments and feel honored to be his close friend. I am confident that his story and poetry will touch people from all walks of life all over the world one day. In my whole life I have not come across very many people with such saintly qualities.

I hope the following interview will help readers to have a better appreciation of Robert's life and poetry.

Dr. K. Sohail

Sohail: Rob! Let me start the interview with your family background. I am curious to know where your family came from and when did they emigrate to Canada?

Rob: My family was from the south of Holland. After the war the economy was not good in Holland and my parents, because of having a big family, were having difficulties. They were worried that their children would not have a good future in Holland. So to ensure a better and brighter future they gave up all their possessions, sold everything and moved to Canada. In 1953, to bring twelve children in a boat, it cost them their life savings. My family like many other Dutch families, landed in Halifax. From there the family boarded a train and came to Chatham, Ontario, because they were sponsored by a priest there. They lived in an immigrants' home for a short while. After my father got a job as a carpenter, their living conditions started to improve.

Sohail: What did your dad do in Holland?

Rob: He was a carpenter. He once owned his own business and at one time used to build caskets. He also owned a home. They had a good life in Holland, but did not see a bright future for their children there.

Sohail: Were your parents from big families themselves?

Rob: Yes, they were. My father was from a family of eleven and my mother from a family of seven, but they had fifteen children themselves.

Sohail: Where were you born?

Rob: In Chatham, Ontario.

Sohail: What are your earliest memories of your family?

Rob: I have a lot of memories about Christmas time, because for us children Christmas was always special. Now that I look back I feel that my parents must have sacrificed a lot, because they were quite poor, but they made Christmas special for us.

Sohail: So they are fond memories.

Rob: Yes, most of them. Both my parents were very loving parents. They did everything for their kids. They gave up everything in Holland and moved to Canada for their children.

Sohail: In one of your writings you wished you were his grandson rather than his son.

Rob: The reason for that is that my father was fifty-one when I was born. He was old and tired then. As I grew older we had differences of opinion. What I saw in my house was that the grandchildren were allowed to do certain things that I was not allowed to do and that made me jealous. I wished I were his grandchild and could be nurtured more like the other grandchildren. They were wonderful grandparents.

Sohail: What was your mother like as a person?

Rob: She was a wonderful loving person, but could also be domineering. She had to be strong to raise a big family. She could never let her guard down. Mom always had a strong hold on the family. She had to fend for all of us. By moving to Canada, not only did they have to learn a new language and adjust to a new society, they also had to fight for their rights. My mother argued with the teachers in the school. My older siblings went to a Catholic school and they were asked to wear a uniform, which my parents could not afford.

All they had to wear was used clothing. My mother also had arguments with neighbors, because being a large immigrant family we got blamed for things we had not done. So my mother became a stronger woman fighting all those battles for her children in school and also in the neighborhood.

Sohail: What was it like for you growing up in a family of fifteen?

Rob: There seemed to be three families living in the same house. The older brothers and sisters, the middle brothers and sisters and then the younger ones. Dad went out to work and mom looked after the children. The older girls helped mom look after the younger kids. When the older boys were thirteen or fourteen they went out to work picking tomatoes. Some of the older sisters worked in an old nun's home and others cleaned houses. Some of the money they earned was spent to buy what the family needed. And they resented that. So there were power struggles in the family. The older siblings felt they were sacrificing things and felt disappointed that their younger siblings did not appreciate their sacrifices. They always felt we owed them something. There was a lot of sharing in our family, maybe at times too much sharing. People do need some kind of ownership.

Sohail: What are your earliest memories of school?

Rob: I remember going to kindergarten and my mom dressing me well. I was probably one of the best-dressed kids there. I always had this really nice plaid type of sweater with a bow tie and I liked to dress nice. The older siblings went to a Catholic school and faced a lot of problems with the nuns. This one nun in particular used to physically beat them and if they did not go to school because of fear, they were beaten again. So the older ones quit school and ended up working in the fields or cleaning houses. My mom was just horrified. She did not want the same thing to happen to the younger children, so she sent us to a public school. The public system was a little better. The teachers were good, but they still treated us as immigrants who were not very smart. I failed grade one there. Rather than helping me they ignored me. They did not seem to care whether we did well or not, they just pushed us through the system. They thought we had to work in the fields anyhow. Like my older brother and sisters I did not get any nurturing from my teachers. Later I remember we were labeled as a family of slow learners. They never tried to give us a good education.

Sohail: What language did you speak?

Rob: I spoke English. My parents spoke Dutch with all of us and could switch if they had to. I could talk Dutch, but I never talked to my parents in Dutch.

Sohail: Was your family religious, conservative and traditional, or were they liberal in their value system and lifestyle?

Rob: My family at one time was very religious. Before my father got married, he wanted to become a priest. All of his brothers were priests or missionaries. But in Holland you had to pay large amounts of money to become a priest. So my father being the oldest son got married and decided to have a large family. He tried to instill religious values in us. As long as he was alive we were asked to get down on our knees and pray the Rosary in Dutch after supper. But my mother was not as religious as my father. So after he had passed away she would jump from church to church. She was open to new ideas in life. When my mother was young, she was even rebellious against the church. When she was expected to wear her hair long, she cut it short. When she was supposed to wear a dress she wore pants. I know I got my rebellious attitude from her. My father, on the other hand, was a deep thinker and sometimes philosophized about life. But in real life they were both confined to a religious frame of mind and traditional lifestyle.

Sohail: When you wrote the poem,

When I Was Young

When I was young
the days
were imperialistic
like the times
Dogma was the rule
and God was feared
life was simple then
and so was I

What kind of dogma were you thinking about?

Rob: Being brought up in a family where your father was going to become a priest and having uncles as missionary brothers and my parents having priests for friends made for some one sided conversations. Priests liked big families who would invite them for special dinners and listen to their preaching on special dogmas and rituals. Back then for example I did not understand why people had to dress up to go to church. Why couldn't they go in jeans or what they normally wore? I never liked the rules the church enforced and also the concept of sin. When people did not follow certain rules they became sinners. I always believed that dogma was for God fearing people who could not think for themselves and needed guidance and I being an open-minded person always questioned dogma.

Sohail: When did you break away from the traditions of family, school and the church?

Rob: I started questioning religion even when I was very young. I remember thinking as a child that if according to the bible if there was a big flood that destroyed the whole world then how come the world is still here. I used to question things that did not make sense to me. When I questioned things in school, I used to get in trouble. When I was in grade three I asked my teacher whether it was possible that a seed was dropped on earth and was planted here and then all life grew from it. My teachers used to discourage such questions. Once I went for confession and I told the priest that I questioned the existence of God and he kicked me out of church.

Sohail: Let's come back to your schooling. What happened after you failed grade one?

Rob: I believe my teachers thought I was stupid like many other immigrant families' children. They did not pay special attention to us. Now I look back at that period and remember that I had done some extraordinary things. When I was in grade seven I had written a book. It was about human anatomy. I had drawn the pictures by hand of different parts of the human body and had copied (plagiarized) the words from medical books to explain the pictures. I had placed them all in a nice binder and gave it to my teacher. The teacher said it was wonderful and showed it to other teachers, but he did not encourage me to pursue my artistic talent. They ignored and overlooked my special talent. Now that I look back I realize that I was very annoyed over that.

When I was in grade eight at graduation I received a leadership award, to my surprise, because I also had a talent for leadership skills. Although that leadership award was well deserved, I was sent to a vocational school for slow learners. So I started going to a vocational high school, Sir George Ross in London, which then only had grade ten basic education. I had to travel thirty miles to get there. I really enjoyed that school and performed very well. The teachers were nice. They saw that I and my older brothers and sisters worked hard and we were all at the top of our classes. That should have made someone think that if the Grimmincks are doing so well, they are not slow learners.

In that school I developed a special interest in photography and decided that I was going to become a photographer. They had a wonderful photography program and I did very well in it. I never did like to get my hands dirty so I did not want to become a mechanic or an upholsterer. I loved taking pictures and it was challenging to my creative abilities. It was a two-year course and I was confident that after finishing that course I could get a job as a photographer. For the first time in my life, I was happy. I could see my dreams coming true. The following year I was forced to attend the local high school Medway High in Arva, because I lived thirty miles away and the school had just built a new addition to accommodate slow learners. I requested to stay at the same school for the second year to finish the photography program. The school board turned down my request. My parents tried hard, but the school board did not agree. So I was sent to a different school and my dreams were shattered.

(Rob started crying at this stage. After he composed himself he continued.)

In the new school there were a lot of problems, teenagers fighting using drugs, being delinquent and violent. Even in the new school I was sent to a slow learner's class, but the teachers did not know how to teach children with special needs. They saw us as a bunch of farmers who did not have to learn anything. I was very frustrated. I worked hard, but the teachers did not acknowledge or appreciate my hard work. I got very angry, angry with my teachers and also with my parents for letting me be destroyed by the system. I was angry at the system that it did not let me be what I wanted to be. I had an opportunity to be a photographer, but I was deprived of that: I was so angry that I left school after basic grade ten. I left my studies prematurely and started in a factory making bicycle tires in the summer of 1973.

Sohail: How old were you then?

Rob: I was sixteen at that time. I enjoyed my factory work and made some money. I had no intention of ever going back to school, because there was no hope of a better education. But in my own heart, because of the way I thought, I felt more educated than many others who had more formal education than I did.

Sohail: How was your social life as a teenager?

Rob: I did not have a social life. I was a very lonely person. I remember an incident before I became a teenager. I was invited to a birthday party and I was all excited. But then an hour before the party my friend called me up and told me I was not allowed to come, because there were already too many children. So I did not go to the party and I was brokenhearted. Interestingly enough three or four years ago when I took my sons to a baseball game I met that friend again. He told me that he remembered that party and he felt bad for all those years for doing that. He did not say why nor did I want an explanation, but I knew that he felt bad about it. So I did not socialize much and did not have any friends. When you have a big family your family members become your friends. My mother did not encourage friends. As a teenager we had to walk or bike over to a farmer's house who had a baseball field. There were no extra cars to take friends back and forth.

Sohail: So you were not only neglected in school, but also felt isolated socially.

Rob: Yes. I felt a little more isolated because I was one of the younger ones. The older siblings could drive cars and had made friends and started dating. I used to feel quite lonely.

Sohail: At what age did you start dating?

Rob: I never started dating until I was eighteen. After working in a different factory for a couple years I met some girls through the guys I used to work with. I remember dating a girl for six months. She was very good looking. In fact she came second in a Beauty Queen contest at the CNE in Toronto.

But then again she was from a well-educated family and she knew that my life was going nowhere. So we finally broke up. Then I went out with a few more girls, but they did not last either. And then I met Teresa. Her parents were unique. They took me for what I was. There was a special bond between us. Like me, her father was from a family of fifteen. They saw I was a hard-working guy and they embraced me right away. The interesting thing was that although I liked Teresa, she was not the type of woman I was looking for. I wanted a woman who was going to stay at home with my children while I worked. When I got to know Teresa I realized that she was like my mother. She was a strong woman who could take control. She had a good sense of direction in her life and she had focus. Teresa told me I could become whatever I wanted to become and she would help me in achieving my goals.

Teresa has some of the same qualities as my mom. She is strong and would not let anyone bring her down.

Sohail: What was your parents' reaction to the women you dated?

Rob: My dad had passed away before I started dating. My mother did not meet the other women I dated. I never brought them home. When my siblings met Teresa it was not that they did not like her, but she was not the so called, "traditional woman" and that is what they did not like. But I liked her partly because they did not like that quality in her. I knew they could not push us around because of her strengths. In her presence it was very difficult for them to say anything. Surprisingly, Teresa and my mother got along fine. They were both strong women and respected each other's territory. My mom had a lot of respect for Teresa's family, because they were educated, hard working and well respected in the community.

Sohail: Was Teresa in nursing school at the time?

Rob: Yes, when I met her she was just starting nursing school at Fanshawe College at the St. Thomas campus.

Sohail: How long did you know each other before marriage?

Rob: We dated for three years before we got married.

Sohail: How did you take the final step?

Rob: Because of insecurities I dumped her many times. Once I told her that I wanted to pursue my photography and did not have the money. But each time she found an excuse to get back. She always nurtured me and told me that we could work out our problems together. But then I would find another excuse to dump her. And then at a New Year's dance, when we had known each other almost two years we got into a disagreement and she dumped me. She told me she wanted nothing to do with me. And that shocked me. I could not believe that she had left me. At that time I realized that she was the right woman for me, as she brought out the best in me. So I proposed to her and then a year later we got married.

Sohail: For how long have you been married?

Rob: Seventeen years.

Sohail: How many children do you have?

Rob: Five boys.

Sohail: How is your marital and family life different than you expected?

Rob: My concept of the family was very traditional. I hoped my wife would stay at home and I would work, but it turned out quite opposite. Teresa was the main breadwinner and carried the financial burden while I lost my job and had to stay at home for two years with my oldest boys. We reversed our roles. Teresa had the full time career and I did the cooking and the cleaning and took care of the two oldest boys. Surprisingly I really enjoyed that. My staying home developed a special bond between me and the children and I also learnt how much work it is to look after the house and the children. I learnt to share the workload with Teresa, and since I went back to work we share the responsibilities at home, which enhances our relationship.

Sohail: Did the nurturing side of your personality surprise you?

Rob: It surprised me, but it felt natural. My mom used to tell me that when they first got married my dad used to help her with the chores. So it must have been part of me, but I had not realized it.

Sohail: I always perceived you as a gentle, kind and caring man, quite different than other men, who have a traditional macho attitude. Do you see yourself as different than most men around you?

Rob: Yes, I am very different. I am not into any sports. I am more into philosophy and people's feelings and nurturing others. People come to me with their problems and I listen. I may not give advice, because my advice might not be good, but I am sympathetic. I do not always enjoy my conversations with men, but I can carry on in-depth conversations with women. I find some men are always trying to prove that they are bigger, better and stronger, but I have no desire to do that. I care about people and what makes them tick not the materialistic things.

Sohail: You mentioned that you drew in school and also had an interest in photography. At what stage did you become conscious that you were an artist and that the creative side of your personality needed to be nurtured and developed?

Rob: Actually I never did and I don't believe that I am a real artistic person. I always felt that it was a stage I was going through. I taught myself to play the guitar. I learnt to play it well, but then I stopped it. I always could draw and sometimes very well, but then I stopped doing it. Everything I did, I did it very well for a short time and then stopped it. That is what worries me about my writing. You have heard me talk off and on about stopping it. That's because I don't feel confident about my creative potential. I don't think it can go anywhere. I am surprised that I have been writing as long as I have. I find it hard to see myself as a real artist.

Sohail: Is it because you have not found the right form of expression, a form that you can stay with for the rest of your life? Is it that you are still dating and have not found your partner? I believe that one day it will come together for you.

Rob: I believe it only when some one says it. I see my Industrial Design skills and I know that I am good at it. I see my poetry and some good things are happening there. And I see my participation on advisory boards as expressing leadership skills. But I don't seem to have the confidence. I can't see when they will all come together. Without the reassurance I think I am going to fail. It will take a person like you, a person like Teresa, or a teacher like Sam Morrison, who will help me get there. All of you have been trying, but I don't think I have done it yet. I have the potential, but I haven't reached it yet.

Sohail: Do you say all that because of your insecurities, or because you are a modest and humble person?

Rob: I do downplay it because I am always waiting for the big fall.

Sohail: A person who was considered a slow learner in school, goes back to school and gets all kind of awards. Does that not make you feel confident?

Rob: Yes in some ways. My biggest achievement was going back to school and getting my high school diploma with honors through my hard work and being recognized for that achievement. All the other awards were a bonus. I appreciate all those bonuses, but I am fully aware that it is going to stop. But I will always be thankful for being recognized for my achievements and maybe I can inspire and encourage others through my literature. If I could do that I will feel successful, but I still don't feel secure or successful at this point.

Sohail: You know that you have already inspired a number of children and adults.

Rob: Yes.

Sohail: You know that you ignite a spark of enthusiasm and optimism in people you meet.

Rob: When any student or person comes to me and tells me that they were inspired by me I do feel successful.

Sohail: In your poetry I feel undertones of spirituality. How did you develop the humanistic and spiritual aspect of your personality?

Rob: I think I got it from my mother and father. My parents were not materialistic. Whatever they did, they did for their children. Material things never really interested me. I think I always had a spiritual side to me, but it was not until I got married and studied different religions that I got in touch with my spiritual dimension. But I did not express it until I had the industrial accident, and started writing. It was at that time that I had to ask myself "What do I want from life?" And I decided that I wanted education. It was during that time that I was reading the book *Seth Speaks* which helped me see life from a totally different perspective. It was at that time I started believing that I could change my life and since then I have changed a lot of things for myself and one of them is discovering my spirituality.

Sohail: What did you learn from Seth?

Rob: I also read another book called Seth Material which describes a completely new concept of life. I learnt that we all are part of All That There Is and we have multi-dimensional selves. We experience them simultaneously. We experience past, present and future all at the same time. It would be like running three movie projectors, one projecting the history of the Romans, one the present life and the third one Star Wars, all at the same time, but unaware of each other. Seth introduced me to a completely new philosophy. To believe in our dreams and that we actually create our own reality.

And then I read Walt Whitman who was saying almost the same kind of stuff. I could not believe a poet like Whitman writing similar things hundred years ago. To me it seem so radical for his times.

Sohail: Who introduced you to Whitman's writing and philosophy?

Rob: When I was taking a grade eleven English course at the Centre for Lifelong Learning my teacher Sam Morrison who also read Seth told me that if I liked Seth's books I would enjoy Walt Whitman, because they have similar philosophies. Sam wanted me to do a presentation on Whitman. So I started researching him and I started to read his stuff. It was difficult in the beginning, but a few things hit me right away. As I was reading about Walt I also started to draw him. I could feel in his hair the elements of life. I could feel the hardships and the gracefulness in the wrinkles of his face. While I was drawing Whitman I could sense that his eyes were worldly and he was a loving person. I could feel his poetry. So I drew Walt all out and I wrote a poem about him and presented all that to the class with an oral presentation. Sam was impressed. He gave me a mark of 11 out of 10 and I presented my drawing as a gift to Sam as he had introduced him to me.

Sam loved the drawing. Reading Walt Whitman opened a new world for me and I started writing. It all came out and I felt strange. I had not planned it. It was all a surprise for me. It kept pouring out and it is still pouring out.

Sohail: How has that outpouring of creative energy in poetry and literature changed your life?

Rob: My poetry connected me to the world. In one sense it connected me to you. I remember the dinner when you read my poetry and told me it was wonderful and gave me a few suggestions. I then sent my poems to other poets and I was surprised by their responses. I was ready for negative responses. I wanted someone to say to me “Rob! It’s terrible. You might as well give up writing.” But they did not say that. They all encouraged me and gave hints to make it better. They were all extremely helpful. I wondered why they would encourage a nobody. And then I started enjoying writing and then I saw my philosophy being expressed through my poetry. I would read my poems to ordinary people and they liked it too. Whenever I did lectures on illiteracy I incorporated poems into my presentations and people raved over them. They loved my poetry and I came to realize that there was something more to my poetry than I had originally thought.

Sohail: So you were surprised when you touched the hearts and souls of ordinary people with you poetry?

Rob: Yes, I was. Because I am not always touched by other people’s poetry. I was touched by Walt Whitman, Togore and by some of Earle Birney’s work. For example his poem “David” touched me. So I was surprised when I touched other people’s hearts.

Sohail: You talked about an inner child in your poetry. Tell me about him.

Rob: I firmly believe that my inner child was never developed or nurtured in a healthy way. Being brought up in a large family who had neither the time nor the caring attitude made family dynamics difficult for me. So the academic and creative aspect of my personality never had an opportunity to develop until just recently.

Sohail: What do you foresee now in your family, academic, literary and social lives? How do you see your future unfolding?

Rob: It is hard for me to foresee, because a lot of things are happening. I have a lot of options, but there are also a lot of barriers. My poetry is developing, but it is not mature enough. My industrial design skills are very good, but the economy is not doing very well. The school has indicated that it would like to hire me as a part time teacher, but I need full time work. I feel confident that finally I will get over these stumbling blocks, but I am not sure which road I will take.

Sohail: So there are possibilities, but no concrete plans.

Rob: Yes.

Sohail: Do you see a bright future ahead of you?

Rob: I always had worked hard and tried to do my best, but I always faced hurdles. I hope one day I can inspire other people and by sharing with them my little story, I hope that it gives them courage to follow their own dreams.

Sohail: In the end I want to ask about your dream. In your poem ‘Sometimes’ you write:

*Sometimes all we have to do
is dream a different dream
and really believe
it will come true*

Tell me about your dream

Rob: I always had dreams and I tried to make them come true, because they were not unrealistic. If I were going to dream about being a brain surgeon it would be unrealistic, but after my industrial accident I dreamt of going back to school which I did. Receiving my grade twelve diploma was the fulfillment of that dream. I not only received education myself, I was also instrumental in changing the law that all adult learners have the right to a high school diploma. My dream helped other peoples' dreams come true. Even in College, I had become one of the top students. When I suffered from the accident I had the choice of just lying in bed doing nothing but whine and complain. I had every right to suffer and complain. My doctor had told me that my injury was so serious that I could have been crippled for the rest of my life. I could have easily taken the martyr's path and been pensioned off permanently, but I chose another way. I went back to school and Teresa helped me. She encouraged me and I succeeded.

Sohail: When I look at your dedication and commitment and accomplishments I feel very proud. I know that there are millions of people in Canada and all over the world who are illiterate. I believe that your story will be a source of inspiration for all of them. I believe that your dream can become the dream of millions of others. I feel very optimistic about your future.

Rob: The last time you encouraged me like this and supported me, I felt inspired to write a poem called 'A Voice' that I want to share with you.

A Voice

The cries of millions reach out
and I have become their voice
I stand literally naked
in front of the world
for all to see
to be judged
perhaps mocked
to tell my most secret
secrets
a silent soldier
fighting a silent war
where the pen
is mightier
then
the sword