

98poems/handwriting

Now that I have  
my handwriting back  
I can begin to build  
my world.  
Some people work in stone,  
I prefer ink,  
this sweet green  
gliding across the page,  
these fat, school girl lines  
that have let me have  
my true hand again,  
allowed it to return,  
like a doll imagined lost,  
and kept it here long enough  
that now I trust it  
to stay.

Where did my handwriting  
go those other years,  
when it had to be  
crammed in school's  
narrow lines,  
the world's small spaces,  
and hurried schedules  
that did not permit  
slow curves and swoops,  
pens that didn't inspire me,  
too much blue and black  
but now -  
it's back!

1/23/98

98poems/bread

I get into trouble  
if I am late  
to pick up my bread,  
the lady at the bakery  
leaves me a message  
threatening to freeze  
my loaves.

The older woman  
who works afternoons,  
the one advised  
by her co-worker to take  
her gambling vacation  
while she can.

She has been using  
echinacea for decades  
she says and never gets  
a cold.

The bright pink she wears  
makes it difficult  
to guess her age, unless  
she were to mention dates,  
but she does not.

I think she is the age  
of my friend's mother  
but can't be sure,  
having lost that gauge  
as I've gotten closer  
to it myself.

She is cheery,  
there is no other  
word for it,  
and unrelenting  
in her responsibilities  
After nearly a year  
we are beginning  
to work things out,  
that I do not want a bag,  
and will be there

to get my bread,  
even if I am late.

She uses fruit loaf  
for sandwiches,  
territory I have not  
braved as yet.  
Every week my husband  
ventures out:  
California fruit,  
seven grain, whole wheat,  
though in most things  
variety is not his way.  
I inflict it on him  
because I'm the one  
who buys the bread  
and can,  
and though I think  
it is the spice of life  
and I never like  
to do the same thing twice,  
every week I eat Kamut.

1/28/98

98poems/yellow

January is the yellow month,  
All of a sudden the acacia  
burst free. Sour grass blooms  
high and wild, and bitter green.

This is our gentle time of year.  
Grebes sing, dancing their  
courting dance across the lake.

It is my favorite time  
to photograph,  
the optimistic grass  
has forgotten the heat.

Just now one could dream -  
a really good dream,  
filled with plant droppings,  
noisy oak leaves beneath your feet,  
the dust of dried blossoms  
in your lap.  
All over town  
the acacia is blooming.

1/28/98

98poems/water

The water is out again today,  
unannounced as usual,  
except for the gasping hiss  
of the faucet.  
They never let us know.  
You always find out  
naked and ready for a bath,  
toothbrush poised in mid-air.

I wonder if the water is out  
on the other side of town,  
that is to say a block away,  
I think not.

Our three-house block seems  
to have some kind of bad water karma.  
The amateur water department,  
a couple of guys drinking beer,  
digs holes and makes trips into town  
for PVC or joints or God  
knows what.

Sometimes they succeed for a day or so,  
sometimes longer - a few months  
at the most.  
It is not one of the local charms  
but one of its truths.

This life I am living  
is no accident. I wanted  
to get farther from the grid,  
if not off it altogether.  
So here I am,  
without water.

Across the lake  
people lead safer lives,  
protected by a municipal  
water district.  
From where I sit  
I see their large homes

with the red tile roofs  
we are supposed to have  
to make us more indestructible.  
That has never been  
the life for me. There is  
not enough Earth to it,  
too much wall-to-wall,  
too many appliances,  
too many rooms filled  
with too many things.

I contemplate  
a move a block away  
and hope the water  
is truer over there,  
though I fear the dishwasher,  
to say nothing of the trash compactor.  
So I remain a bit afraid to commit,  
for fear the other side of the lake  
is moving over here,  
and I might yet be  
a part of it.

1/28/98

98poems/grebes

## GREBES

Walking down the trail  
I hear chimes in the breeze,  
and then a dog's futile bark,  
and the lap of tires  
against the street.

I am feeling very Thoreau,  
despite my embarrassment  
to do so.  
Grateful for the day,  
to sit upon the rock  
and see the grebe's neck,  
flash white, then black  
and white again,  
as he turns his head  
to hear the swallow's tweet,  
which he answers with  
GREE BE.  
GREE BE.

I cannot extrapolate  
from nature -  
not just yet.  
I dare not.

I used to hate  
quiet water,  
but now take comfort  
from the placid lake,  
the occasional leap  
of an eager bass,  
the grebe's excited dance,  
not unlike my own  
boisterous moments,  
which I still have,  
at least occasionally.

1/28/98

98poems/reeds

REEDS

How long have these reeds  
been flat,  
since before the dam -  
or after?  
Was it still a river then,  
self-respecting  
on its way to the sea,  
high enough to sweep  
these banks,  
when it got in a hurry?

I will never know  
what this land was then,  
like a lover's past  
you cannot infer  
from the absence  
of what is said.

1/28/98



98poems/tradition

TRADITION

Part of a tradition,  
a poet on a rock.  
Part of an Earth,  
where the wind  
picks up through  
my hair and the young  
eucalyptus - in  
the same moment.

Part of a tradition,  
a poet on a rock.  
Part of an Earth,  
where the wind picks up  
through my hair  
and the young eucalyptus -  
in the same moment.

1/28/98

98poems/freer

FREER

Winter.

The lake is full  
of migratory birds,  
Canadian geese,  
white pelicans,  
safe from the fishermen  
who are outlawed  
until March.

We all sigh  
a little deeper,  
sing a little freer.

1/28/98

98poems/gray

My hair grows more gray,  
I experiment with Dos  
that are even more undone  
than my Dos have always been.

I'd like to think I see pink  
from the corner of my eye.  
What would it mean if I did?  
That I have done the dishes too many times,  
have felt guilty when I did not.  
Do. Don't. Either way a cause for doubt  
to women my age, that is to say  
of my generation.

We want our lives to last  
and feel empty that they lack  
the drama of things that don't.

1/28/98

98poems/pouring

Sometimes I think of how  
I poured my heart out,  
as though it were a river  
fed by rains upstream,  
never believing I could  
run dry,  
forgetting droughts.

Sometimes I think  
of how I always gave  
all there was to me,  
to whomever happened to be  
there for the night,  
or afternoon,  
of how I let them  
take without impunity,  
of how I put the pink dress on,  
pastel or fucshia,  
of how I put the flower  
behind my ear,  
in fact or metaphor,  
and went out into the night,  
the rain pouring down,  
my heart pouring out.

1/28/98

98poems/practical

I can get so tired  
of heavy shoes,  
of practical things in general,  
of things that lack sway  
and men who won't dance  
with you.

I try slow dancing  
by myself in the kitchen,  
my trail walkers on,  
as I do with many things -  
just to prove to myself  
I still can,  
a rhapsody in comfortable shoes.

1/28/98

98poems/lie

I have to watch myself  
that I don't say things  
that aren't true,  
just because it's easier  
to assume that I think the cliché  
things somebody might imagine  
I do or should.

I have to be really careful  
that I don't lie,  
the worst of sins for a writer,  
just because it's the quick and  
easy way out, and I have a certain  
taste for that.  
Except, of course, for the part  
of me devoted to struggle cause  
it's the Christian thing to do.

I've never been a poet's poet  
and probably never will,  
but I have to keep trying  
to tell the truth.  
Maybe that's why I live  
where I do, in a house  
without closets,  
where everything you have and are  
is sticking out in view.  
Not for everyone else to see,  
but so that you can yourself.

1/28/98

98poems/buddyholly

Buddy Holly was on the radio,  
I didn't know I should think  
I couldn't be someone.

My mother had a woodpecker  
toothpick holder  
that grabbed the picks  
in its beak.  
Everybody had them then  
and I loved each one  
as though it were the first  
I'd ever seen.

"This is Your Life" sold  
gold locket through the mail,  
I waited for months  
for mine to come.

The first apartment  
I rented on my own  
was an odd alley place,  
which I always remember  
as feeling like no other  
place I ever lived.

I didn't stay long.  
It felt so strange,  
as though it were built  
under a bridge or under the el,  
or under something, though  
our town had nothing really  
for it to be built under.  
A one-door place - they  
have always made me claustrophobic,  
that gave me a loneliness  
it took me a long, long time  
to lose.

1/28/98

98poems/glasses

The life that I lived then  
is hard to remember,  
and bridges between  
there and here  
have gone unseen.  
Some people seem to have  
a continuity I never possessed.  
My life has been episodic  
at best, a dropped ball  
which I pick up again and again,  
chased after across the room,  
rummaged for beneath sofas,  
sat upon by accident  
like glasses on the chair.

1/28/98



98poems/favorite

My favorite song  
was playing on the radio,  
one of the ones  
that grabs my mind  
so hard it keeps me  
up at night.

My renditions rarely do justice,  
sometimes live recordings don't either.  
There is that way that music  
makes you remember your legs,  
your foot tapping on the floor  
you remember how strong  
you really are,  
forget all the ways the world  
made you doubt it,  
it was a song like that.

1/28/98

98poems/words

Words are like a woman  
who loves you  
at your door,  
if you don't answer  
when she knocks  
she may not be back.

1/28/98

98poems/breakfast

A hawk cries out.  
I realize it is raining,  
first from the cars  
on the street, and then  
from the dripping eaves.

I wake up thinking  
of my tightly-fitting jeans,  
the neglected stain on  
the gold silk blouse,  
and a breakfast menu  
of poached eggs on toast,  
with freshly-squeezed juice.

1/29/98

98poems/backingup

I play my music  
uncomfortably loud,  
a failed attempt  
to drown out the sound  
of his computer backing up.  
It changes gears and whines,  
its work an apparent struggle.  
Days now I have tried  
to sleep and work  
through this,  
I am losing patience,  
if I had a gun  
it would not be pretty.

This loud beast  
feeds us, gives us  
clothes and shelter -  
no, it is not the machine  
but the operator -  
perhaps, I should shoot him,  
the one with the real brain,  
the one who can really  
whine.

1/29/98

98poems/moments

My life is a string  
of moments,  
like drops of rain  
gathering  
at the tip  
of a leaf.

1/29/98

98poems/baskets

The first thing I notice  
about a house  
is where the baskets  
will go,  
some little architectural  
detail that says:  
baskets could be here,  
which means so could I.

The house where I live now  
has a wide doorway  
between the kitchen  
and the sun porch  
where I work.  
Not an arch  
but a square.  
Painted blue.  
When I first peered  
through the windows,  
imagining my life  
into this space,  
seeing through its  
shot-gun design,  
I remembered photos  
I had saved,  
of baskets hanging  
from a kitchen ceiling,  
and could picture that  
in this space.

What is it that goes wrong  
with houses,  
that causes us to outgrow  
them, like shoes.  
Our inability to dream  
whole and complete?  
And not as I used to suspect,  
the universe playing  
another nasty trick.  
Trapping me in own  
hasty requests,

exclaiming to God:  
"This is not what I meant."

Faulty manifesting.  
I have grown skitterish,  
feeling the need to qualify  
with more precise details,  
and longer and longer lists.

Recently it has included  
a stainless steel sink,  
not only a re-action to  
the stained one I currently use,  
but something I have always liked.  
So I find a house with  
a stainless steel sink,  
and nothing else to redeem it.  
"I need a place that's  
easy to maintain,"  
becomes central to my  
directive,  
but I have to love it too.

I grow fixated with this  
maintenance issue because  
I am sick of cleaning up.  
Before I've finished my list,  
I find a house I love  
that does not have  
crannies and cobwebs  
built into its character,  
as the houses I loved  
in the past always did.

But it has all electric appliances,  
things I neither need  
nor had thought I wanted.  
A trash compactor which embarrasses  
me to even think about.

"A new broom sweeps clean,"  
she says of her new studio space.  
I misunderstand the adage

and think she says,  
"A new room sweeps clean,"  
which is what I've been thinking,  
though I am apprehensive  
to trust the truth of that.

I'm afraid of what these  
contraptions may do to my soul.  
Why can't I find  
the simplicity I have been  
seeking since long before  
it became fashionable?  
I have been throwing stuff  
away for twenty years,  
and there is still too much.  
I spend time and energy  
trying to free myself  
from mailing lists,  
so there is less to eliminate.  
I have blamed the cats,  
my husband,  
the modern world,  
the working of my own mind.  
I have given up hobbies  
and throttled urges,  
in an attempt to keep the  
stuff at bay, and still  
it does not look like  
the home of someone whose  
policy is:  
the less you own,  
the less you have dust.

I've quit sewing,  
I've quit canning.  
I've quit crafts  
before I began them.  
I don't buy clothes,  
or furniture.  
I've never been one  
for appliances or gadgets,  
never need the latest thing.  
I like what's basic



and enduring,  
but where can I find that?

I have friends who have  
mottoes against order  
displayed on their refrigerator,  
beneath so many other things  
they can never be read.  
That has never been my way.

I have been advised  
that the balance I seek  
cannot be claimed,  
that one hungry cat  
will overthrow it.  
But I can have no  
peace of mind in chaos.

I yearn for the energetic  
vibration of the cleanly  
swept hearth,  
of something gleaming.

I peer in the windows  
of an all-electric house,  
uncertain as ever where  
my mandates are leading me,  
a high shelf in the living room  
with recessed lighting,  
which the realtors bill  
as romantic,  
is a perfect place  
for baskets.

1/30/98

98poems/stilts

It is, no doubt,  
those houses  
by the river,  
the ones on stilts  
that scared me as a child,  
which have made me need  
terra firma,  
while he loves  
this room -  
dreams of it.  
Suspended above ground  
with things to look  
down upon.

Not so much  
the windows,  
I conclude,  
the way they jut  
together,  
making a corner  
of glass.  
or the pinky lavender walls,  
a color that makes me nauseous  
or the creaky floor,  
although that helps,  
not really the view  
but the feeling  
of the room.  
Not unlike the rooms  
I have dreamed,  
with light and glass.

Now I know  
what he dreams,  
But a house without ground  
makes me want  
to cry -  
and so I do for days  
after we look at  
this house.

2/1/98

98poems/fifty

She acted badly  
they thought  
because she was  
a beauty  
turning fifty.

No, it was not my  
beauty I minded  
losing, she declared.  
It was my smarts -  
the mouth  
I had on me then.

But more than  
than that the wit,  
and even worse  
the urge.

2/1/98

98poems/bogged

Bogged down, as one gets  
with a mind that finds  
too many categories,  
the files pile up,  
the scraps of paper  
on the kitchen table  
that don't seem to know  
their place,  
or how to get there.  
I have told myself:  
Expand the categories.  
I have moved things  
from notebooks  
to files,  
to notebooks again.  
I tell myself  
I need more space,  
I tell myself:  
I need less stuff,  
I tell myself  
"Deal with it right away,"  
repeat the adage  
"Handle it once."  
I cancel mail,  
I try to limit my interests,  
curtail activity.  
I spend decades  
seeking focus,  
though it goes  
against my nature,  
which tributaries  
like a river,  
seeking new ground.

It's just the confusion  
that comes from piles,  
the obstructed path  
to thought or creativity,  
there must be something  
I can do.

Perhaps a credenza  
is the answer,  
such a glamorous word  
does not sound like  
something in my house.  
Would my husband come home  
if I owned such a thing?

Tables, perhaps.  
Narrow ones to take  
the overflow,  
large ones where projects  
can spread out.

A painter I know  
has one that is  
an eight foot square -  
well, now we're  
getting there.

2/2/98

98poems/leaking

The roof is leaking,  
our dry creek is running.  
All day he phones  
to say stay in.

I put on my hooded coat  
and go out with the camera,  
to see the dark whirlpools  
swirling around the oaks.

Stepping out on the thin strip  
of ground that remains  
when sense prevails,  
telling me it could collapse  
and I would be swept away.  
I could drown.

My neighbor stands at the fence  
holding her umbrella.  
A volunteer fireman,  
not a sissy like me,  
I have seen her step into  
her rubber boots and pants  
in one swoop, the way firemen do,  
their gear connected  
for quick departure.

I hear the familiar beep  
of the road crew trucks,  
and then the fire truck passes  
its lights flashing.

Up the road temporary water pipes  
have been submerged,  
Sludge races through the culvert  
beneath the road, and  
that's the good news -  
it's still beneath the road.

Cars pass with their lights on,  
splashing me.

I have been at loose ends  
all day, unable to do the usual  
rainy day things,  
the cats and I pacing  
in front of the glass back door,  
watching the yard wash away.

I feel better when I am out  
in it,  
where I can see for myself.  
It is never dull here,  
I exclaim to the cats  
when I return.

The temporary water pipes  
have not held,  
cookie sheets and mixing bowls  
pile up in the sink,  
and it continues to rain.

2/3/98



98poems/next

Where will I be next  
I wonder, sitting at  
my desk.  
Not worry exactly  
but uncertainty,  
a hesitation to trust.

Attached as I am  
to the tangle  
of bougainvillea  
I see each day,  
here where I learned  
at last how to  
spell bougainvillea.

Its savage ways  
in contrast to the  
small neat squares  
of the lattice  
it runs toward.

As I come to meet  
you at the end  
of the day,  
most days at least,  
and follow you about  
with words,  
and if I don't you feel  
neglected somehow,  
and stand beside me  
announcing, "I'm home."

It takes words  
that way,  
words make it so.

2/4/98

98poems/hardrain

Hard rain.  
I could not settle in  
to my usual rainy day.  
The creek up to the shed  
again, so high I could  
see it from the house,  
swirling around the trees.

I went outside,  
almost stepping on  
the last patch of ground,  
when I realized  
it could give way.  
I could be swept up  
and drown.  
Danger.  
Suddenly the water in  
the culvert beneath the road  
broke through the rain-swept  
debris and flowed free.  
The rising creek retreated  
from its newly-cut banks,  
I relaxed and made  
tea.

2/4/98

98poems/buckets

Buckets and bottles  
outside the front door  
to catch the rain,  
water, water . . .  
and I can't flush  
the toilet.

I hear the steady  
stream from the rain gutter.  
Men in yellow slickers  
clear branches from  
the creek,  
here, I hope,  
to repair the water  
pipes . . . again.

The sun breaks through  
on the winter branches,  
a helicopter rumbles past.  
Our little town  
makes the news  
each time it rains.  
Here where nature  
still lives,  
and water may soon  
go over the dam.

The sun and rain compete,  
the cats sit on the stoop  
ready to come in,  
one looking out to the yard,  
the other in.

My ink bottle says  
brilliant green,  
but I think not.  
It is sweet green  
instead.

Brilliant is the wild grass  
growing high on the

banks of the creek,  
the showered leaves  
of ficus and palm,  
and philodendrum,  
the naked ladies  
eager to bloom,  
the parsley and celery,  
the leaves of lettuce,  
vert  
verde  
brilliant.  
Yes, quite  
brilliant.

2/4/98

98poems/rain

RAIN THEN SUN

Rain  
then sun  
then rain again.

Rain, then sun  
then rain.

Sun and rain  
and rain and sun,  
then sun again,  
then rain.

2/4/98

98poems/camping

We can camp  
without leaving home,  
swishing the toothbrush  
about in the cup  
when the water is off.

Cuddling beneath a pile  
of blankets so heavy  
we can hardly move,  
a quilt your great  
grandmother made.

There is this feeling  
I get carrying in wood,  
hurrying out just  
before dark,  
alive to the truth  
of bodily life,  
the need for shelter  
and warmth.

In winter the darkness  
is so much darker,  
I cook supper  
from a place  
so deep I can hardly  
speak.  
Is there anyone else  
but me -  
I can't be sure.

We are camping  
without leaving home,  
in a place we arrived  
at by going farther  
and farther down  
country roads,  
taking the thinner  
and finer lines  
on the map.

To recall  
how we got here  
would hardly be  
worth the effort,  
we are camping  
out, that is all  
that matters.

2/4/98

98poems/inwinter

In winter we grow closer,  
huddle into necessity.  
Perhaps it is the cold  
- or the damp  
that makes me feel  
so impoverished.

Too much rain,  
the floors stay dirty.  
The cats and I pace  
crazily about the place.

Last winter we were  
home together  
for the first time.  
We walked by the lake,  
I tried to coerce  
conversation,  
opinions and plans.

I bought a large bag  
of beans, and another  
of rice, and popcorn,  
as close as I get  
to laying in provisions.

Finally winter lifted,  
the ornamental fruit trees  
bloomed - early, as they do.  
This year they have bloomed  
again, but the desperation  
of winter hangs on.

We cuddle longer each day,  
winter's only redemption.  
Every day I feel  
a little more poor.

2/6/98



98poems/bunt

My Uncle Bunt could strike  
a match on his overalls,  
or was it the men who  
used to hang out with him?  
It's hard to recall,  
I only remember  
the thrill and terror  
of the act,  
the embarrassment  
and shame I felt  
for the stout-looking black man  
who came into the store  
while the men were sitting around,  
a tattered hole in his overalls  
exposing his bare flesh.

2/24/98

98poems/steps

I remember walking fast  
to keep up with my sister,  
my quick chicken steps  
two or three to her one.

Now my sister cannot walk  
at all. She holds my arm,  
I move so slowly I almost  
lose my balance,  
realizing how fragile  
we really are,  
feeling her dwindling flesh,  
the terrible angle of her bones,  
walking for the moment in  
her world, wobbly as jello  
without fruit.  
Skin to skin.  
It all changes  
with time.

I walk with my father  
through his pasture,  
he shows me  
where his ponies grazed  
as he pulls up iris bulbs  
for me to take home.  
His gait, too, has changed  
Capable still, and strong  
but slower and more calm.  
It is only the sound  
of my high heel shoes  
on his floor,  
the even confidence  
I can hear  
in the rhythm  
of my walk,  
that tells me  
I am old enough now  
to know who I am,  
to decide for myself.

??'98

98poems/ghandi

What would Gandhi have done,  
I ask myself,  
reviewing my actions  
like grocery lists.  
I think of Gandhi  
crouched on the floor,  
eating curry with his fingers,  
great gurus dropping in  
for lunch.  
The problem is  
I have asked myself  
too late:  
after instead of before.  
Ghandi would have had less  
to say I'm sure,  
but speech is my specialty,  
particularly talking back,  
especially talking back to men.  
Argument is something  
of a calling card,  
my name itself means  
contentious.  
I have clenched my tongue  
beneath my teeth,  
until it has swollen  
around them, like  
grapes grown inseparably  
into their arbor.  
But the words ooze  
from the pores of my skin  
when I do, demanding  
their place in the room.

What would Gandhi have done,  
had he been a woman,  
his fingers tight around the broom  
to control his temper  
at this latest petty injustice -  
had all his resistance been  
dedicated to small causes,  
that never seem to gather mass,

as laundry so easily does.

I think of Ghandi  
initiated into kriya  
in some small room  
of his simple life,  
these monkish rooms  
I have always longed for  
but never found,  
not only because they are  
easy to clean, but make  
concentration on great causes  
more likely.

I think it is Ghandi's  
photograph I need  
to affix to the refrigerator,  
instead of grocery lists.  
Telling myself:  
*squat upon the Earth,*  
*eat the food she gives you*  
*with your hands,*  
*acquire grace*  
*as you lick them*  
*clean.*

2/20/98

98poems/fish

The gray cat licks his paw,  
and then his mouth.  
We are reveling in the silence  
created by the absence  
of company.  
He looks about cautiously,  
can it be they are gone?  
Ben lied, of course,  
and cats know -  
company, like fish,  
smells in a day.

3/28/98

98poems/chimney

Nothing is ever normal here,  
or done in a regular way.  
The guy who repaired the roof  
is a chimney sweep when that  
is what needs to be done.  
Trolls, my old landlord  
called them, local guys who  
work cheap.

They don't bother  
showing up with tools,  
so you have to provide  
what is needed, screw  
drivers, plastic bags,  
it goes without saying -  
the cleaning up.

None of the romance  
of last year's sweep,  
who mounted the roof  
in a top hat, just for effect.  
Or the sweep next door yesterday  
in a t-shirt with a bow tie  
painted on.  
It's hard to say  
what has more lore  
than chimney cleaning,  
or as much potential  
for scare tactics.  
Pyrolysis someone tells me  
on the phone,  
a chimney fire burns  
at 2000 degrees.

The landlord is not concerned,  
he's hoping it'll go up in flames  
'cause it's insured,  
and take the one next door,  
which he also owns.  
Even my husband assures me  
that it'll be okay,

because, he says, everything  
always works out.  
My question is:  
exactly how?

This year's sweep  
dons a bandana kerchief  
and scrapes the build-up  
from inside the stove  
with a brick layer's trowel,  
which was his occupation  
an hour ago.

4/2/98



98poems/juliette

For days the sound of her voice  
lingers in the house,  
the echo of her inflection.  
There's something about the word  
*actually*  
on a three-year-old's tongue,  
the joy of words fully alive  
I imitate her gesticulations,  
but it is not enough.  
We both wait.  
And in time  
the familiar silence  
returns.

4/3/98

98poems/winter

## DEL DIOS WINTER

Coming out of a Del Dios winter  
is like returning from war,  
the chill of uninsulated houses  
biting the bones,  
the spirit has a weariness  
which exceeds tract home winter.

I am a hibernating bear stumbling  
about the house in Ugg boots,  
bundled in stained and faded clothes.  
A lake-worthy wardrobe,  
good for walking through damp woods.  
My sinuses sting from the Franklin fires,  
which have long since ceased to be  
cozy or comforting to the soul.

My head is heavy, my bones  
hurt more than usual.  
I am suffocating for something  
delicate and lovely,  
the optimism of a daffodil,  
a spring dress, an open-toed shoe.

Winter weighs on me like the  
layers I have slept beneath for months,  
my jaws locked in place,  
a defense against the shivering cold.

Winter is the hide I wear,  
its fatty stench rubbing against  
my skin, too long with nothing pretty.  
Days, weeks, seasons when the challenge  
to endure is the only  
requisite that can be met.

This year spring will not come,  
every sunny day chased away  
with yet another rain.  
The chill will not loosen

its grip on the house,  
the garden has no new bloom  
by Easter.

I push my head  
into the bear hide I wear,  
and stamp my boots  
as I dance in a circle  
in front of the fire.

I cannot carry the weight  
of the quiet season another day,  
I buy sandals and wear  
them with socks.

4/8/98

98poems/voile

Especially in spring  
I miss the dream,  
not the thought  
that he might call  
because he wouldn't have,  
but the wordless hunger  
that followed me everywhere,  
to the post office,  
the store -  
in every small action  
and purchase -  
some silent place that  
hoped, perhaps, this color  
would make it all different,  
would be the key that would  
open the life, like a moldy  
suitcase with a rusted lock  
left in the attic before  
you were born -  
inside the voile dresses,  
wrapped in lavender,  
with delicate tucks  
and ribbon roses,  
all fit you to a T.

4/14/98

98poems/wild

Alexander the cat rolls  
in the grass,  
feet up in the air,  
then pauses to stare at me,  
until he seems to realize  
I am telling his tale  
and runs away.

A motorcyclist makes a u-turn  
in the street,  
the last stragglers speed past  
on their way to work.  
After a terribly long winter  
the sun begins to burn my arm,  
but still I won't go in.  
I sit in the pink chair  
and watch the pine's shadow  
on the damp ground,  
the few surviving daisies  
from last year's failed crop  
of wildflowers.  
Wild things want to choose  
where they'll grow, I am told.  
I know that's how I am,  
but still I want nature  
to bend to my intentions,  
despite the decades that  
I've resisted hers.  
I hear morning birds  
I cannot name, city trucks  
and the grind of heavy equipment,  
the neighbor's radio  
playing in her truck.

4/16/98

98poems/bluejay

A blue jay hops down  
from the bare acacia,  
hacked back to a silhouette  
lacking leaf, or bloom,  
or branch.  
He scans his scene, deciding  
on the neighbor's chimney  
instead of the tree.  
I too have felt the  
disappointment of foliage  
clipped harshly back.  
There are many who think  
a hard pruning is the only way  
a pruning can be.  
But the severity pains me,  
I gently wiggle a leaf free  
if it is ready,  
clip only the most dangerous  
branch which threatens the tree.  
I have always been a Zen gardener,  
I am good at hand work,  
small details.  
Picking up leaves in tight places,  
which can't be gotten to  
with a rake.

4/17/98

98poems/counting

I like counting.

I don't like measuring.

4/16/98

98poems/sweeping

I hear the neighbor  
sweeping her walk,  
an industrious woman  
with a penchant for vacuuming.  
She likes to talk about cleaners,  
which she refers to as products.  
She is equally committed  
to appliances.  
I see her going at  
her week-old truck  
with a shop vac,  
polishing the car  
with an electric gizmo.  
We first met when she came  
to borrow electricity  
the night she moved in,  
so she could vacuum in the dark.  
Like Eudora Welty's character  
who goes to the neighbor's  
to borrow fire.  
It got us off to a difficult start,  
preferring, as I do,  
contemplation to cleaning  
at that time of night.

4/17/98



98poems/bookworm

They always called me  
Bookworm.  
It's true,  
I fed upon books.  
I still do.

Feeling empty  
and unable to work,  
I go to the bookstore  
to eat.

1998

98poems/chinaberry

Blue jay in the chinaberry tree,  
unaware of the cat fights  
that have marked the day.  
Some fuzzy, mottled intruder,  
our cat holding his own  
as he has had to,  
since we moved in.  
The chinaberry tree is  
about to break into its  
momentary bloom,  
just as it did  
the spring we came.  
A happy surprise  
when I drove into town  
that misty May day,  
a bloom I had never  
seen before,  
my favorite pleasure.

Yellow flowers have  
given way to purple,  
and our pink wedding rose,  
a cheery shade like  
the '50s lawn chairs  
I acquired from  
the neighbor,  
Barbie's favorite color  
that seems to require  
plastic flamingos along  
the fence.  
Spring has been slow  
in coming,  
as most things  
in my life have.

4/22/98

It's been an exciting time in Del Dios. We've made the news more this year than probably any other time in Del Dios history. First for the fires, and then for the mud slides. And the really big news - water going over the damn. That got us a regular slot on the local news. Momentarily we were a tourist attraction. People flocked to see. Some of them not knowing where the damn was, trying to walk there from the trail to the boat dock. A feat which requires walking on water. We were the favorite Sunday drive. Cars parked on both sides of the highway for a mile and families with young children walked out in the road to the dam. It had a festive flavor I hadn't seen Cristo's umbrellas. Streams of families out to see something they have heard about on the news, picnicking on the cement bases of the umbrellas. A certain sizzle in the air - until the terrible accident which led to death.

Down by the damkeeper's house onlookers crowded on the narrow strip of dirt. The police had it taped off like a crime area with a guard in a van to keep the eager from scaling down to the dam.

Well, not since Tim tried to kill Mimi has there been such excitement in Del Dios, Bill says. According to him helicopters swarmed over some cabin on Date Lane, where he hid out. They lived by him in the house that used to be the Del Dios church, the one that Sam covered over with camouflage and rebuilt without a permit - the way most of Del Dios was built. - until that day Bill saw Mimi speeding down the hill after Tim on this bike, trying to run him over, but he had a gun. You have to hear the story from Bill 'cause I wasn't there and I've never been one to tell things second hand - and if I do I don't do a good job of it. What I find hard to believe is that Del Dios ever had a church. And Bill died the year he told me the story so I can't ask him about it.

Spring 1998

98poems/friends

## FRIENDS

Sometimes when I'm out,  
I look up to see  
one of my walking friends,  
people I know  
only on the trail.  
We wave, always a large  
sweeping wave -  
there's something about  
a walking wave like no  
other,  
the way it reaches out,  
open,  
without the social guise  
of other greetings.  
And then we jump right  
in to conversation,  
a daughter's phone call  
a birthday celebration  
surprise drop-ins  
spring cleaning  
the windmill Grandfather built  
the wife's recurring cancer  
tales of Del Dios,  
who lives in the big gray  
house.

4/24/98

98poems/blossoms

Every day I watch the chinaberry,  
one morning it will have gone  
from bud to bloom,  
and I will have missed  
the moment of transformation.  
There is no way I cannot.

I love our back yard  
and hate to think of leaving,  
at least when I am observing  
it from my desk.

Surveying the damage  
of plants that have failed -  
well, that's a different  
story.

Watching the death  
accumulate beneath  
the eucalyptus,  
the weeds grow back  
in persistent abundance -  
then I seem able  
to let go.

Except for the stone-lined  
bed of mint,  
which feels like  
every woman's garden,  
a grandmother's garden,  
something ancient  
and European,  
the debate rages again  
unabated by the fact  
that I can't eat mint.

4/24/98

98poems/bottlebrush

The house I may  
move into,  
offers me a view  
of a young bottle brush,  
nothing one would  
want to call a tree.  
The whole of it revealed  
through the small window,  
which might one day  
be over my desk.

I'm not so bad  
at change, but loss  
I've little tolerance of.  
This old mis-shapen  
chinaberry hacked back  
here and there at some  
indifferent landlord's  
whim,  
its trunks topped  
flat as tables.  
And still each spring  
they sprout new shoots,  
polished leaves a rich  
dark green we rarely see,  
more branches than  
it should ever have to  
support, but it is  
willing to and does.

That day when we  
were wondering  
whether to live here,  
he lay back, perplexed,  
against its trunk,  
the oldest, widest one  
which has grown parallel  
to the ground,  
and looking at him  
I knew, of course,  
we would.

4/24/98

## SNAKE IN THE GRASS

My husband hopes to  
happen upon a snake,  
I do not - and so I do.  
This morning my friend asks  
if the woman I just passed  
warned me of the rattler.  
We look down and there it is,  
crossing the asphalt between us.  
A big one, eight to ten rattles,  
he thinks,  
close to four feet in length.  
I am calm this time,  
do not shriek and run away  
as I have in the past.  
We stand quietly and watch  
as the snake makes his way  
across the pavement,  
Back in the grass  
it all but disappears,  
had we not watched we  
would have never known  
it was there.  
That is why they say  
a snake in the grass,  
my husband says,  
which is when  
it got scary.



98poems/hislife

## HIS LIFE

Daily, or at least  
when we meet on the path,  
he tells me a little more  
about his life,  
of how his grandparents  
hung wet sheets to keep cool,  
of the house his grandmother  
bought in Monterey,  
without telling her husband.  
And how he traded an investments job  
for working with his hands.  
He has reached that age,  
when disappointments  
- not so much regret,  
as the fear of regret -  
seem to crowd the rooms  
where he sits, feeling  
life has always pushed him  
away from opportunity.  
He bought here cheap,  
and can't tell how  
to get out,  
or if he wants to.

4/27/98

98poems/anniversary

"Happy Anniversary, baby  
got you on my mind,"  
I am thinking as I watch  
you get into the car,  
two sweaters and a denim jacket  
crumpled in the back seat,  
three big books smashed  
on the floor behind  
the driver's seat.  
I am always surveying you,  
smoothing your eyebrows,  
tucking in your shirt,  
re-arranging your cap.  
Today you have left home  
in a new shirt - unironed.  
I forced myself  
to let you go that way.  
It was something I felt  
I had to do.  
But don't get any ideas  
that I am giving up  
any claim I have to  
you as my territory,  
my life.

4/30/98

98poems/rewinding

I watch someone remove her name  
from the guest book in our wedding video.  
I watch us go backwards down the stairs,  
as we so often do in our life.  
Things don't come easily for us.  
We are two steps forward,  
three steps back,  
reversing to another new beginning,  
rewinding.

4/30/98

98poems/dismantle

Preparing to move,  
I hesitate to dismantle  
my kitchen wall,  
the one over the table  
with the Hopi sifting basket  
the four colors of Hopi corn,  
photos I took  
and a basket I made.

5/18/98

98poems/moving

He sorts through  
his untended boxes  
from the last few years,  
I stare at the growing  
emptiness.

He cannot see it, much  
as he does not notice home  
coalesce around him.

Nor chaos.

The outlines where baskets  
hung on the walls,  
stained by our daily fires,  
the bare shelf where  
my mother's bells sat,  
the mirror corner  
where my string of wooden  
spools hung.

My weeds have gathered  
with their pots  
in a box near the front door,  
my baskets beside them.

First to come,

first to go,

what I like best and  
can carry by myself.

My policy used to be  
to own nothing two women  
couldn't lift.

But I've failed to keep it up,  
in the form of a sleeper  
sofa and a tile table  
too heavy to talk about.

And there are too many books,  
no matter how much  
I weed them out.

6/2/98

98poems/dusty

His dusty guitar leaning  
against the wall,  
my pool cue that  
rides behind the seat  
as I drive,  
the passing testimonials  
to who we were,  
or who we  
wanted to be.

6/4/98

98poems/lizard

## LIZARD

I try to out wait  
the lizard on the road,  
his head turned so that  
his left eye can size me up.  
I realize he will out last me  
in the sun,  
but wait a little longer  
before I concede.

Sometimes I see one of them  
hurrying across the road,  
high on his legs,  
looking more like a road runner  
than a reptile.

Other times I find the ant-covered  
remains dropped by the cat,  
a head or a tail missing,  
a leg and foot snapped off.

I watched a lizard on a patio once,  
and tried to write a poem  
to unborn children,  
naming them lizard  
in a Buddhist tradition  
someone told me of,  
and now I know  
no more  
what became of it  
than I do of them.

6/29/98

98poems/learning

It was the summer I ate mangoes,  
dripping over the kitchen sink.  
Despite all I had read,  
and what I knew about the necessity  
of sitting down to eat,  
of doing nothing else  
at all while you eat -  
meaning no apples when you walk,  
no popcorn in front of the t.v.  
I knew all this.  
But it was all so complicated at the time.  
It was Zen cooking to eat a mango at all-  
by which I mean I was  
doing the best I could,  
as the Zen maxim states  
to make the very best meal you can  
with what you have in your cupboard  
right now.

It was a confusing time  
when I bought a Pepsi Cola  
and turned on daytime t.v.  
without being sick.  
I was exhausted that's all,  
by my recent move,  
the year's events,  
the sudden onset of summer,  
though it had arrived late,

He said he had to see  
if he could learn to work again,  
after the winter slump.  
Just this morning  
I called A.T. Cross seeking a cure  
for my dried out fountain pen nib.  
"We recommend not storing them  
full of ink," she said.  
I hadn't thought I was storing it,  
I simply couldn't find the top  
of my desk for several weeks.  
Nor the top of the kitchen counter,



nor the table.  
Tops of things simply couldn't be found.  
My pen went dry,  
my computer forgot how to turn  
itself on where it was left,  
I ate mangoes over the kitchen sink.

7/8/98

98poems/movie

Summer day with  
the air conditioning on,  
outside becomes a movie.  
I see the oak branch  
bend in the breeze,  
the bottle brush tree  
bounces against  
the overgrown vine  
in my neighbor's yard.

It could be a video,  
a very clear photo  
pasted to the window.  
A white car drives past  
in silence,  
all I hear is the whir  
of the air conditioner.

7/8/98

98poems/round

Searching for the round  
in the basket,  
as I hang it on the wall.  
Symmetry is something which has yet  
to come into my hands.

I loved the expression  
"All things want to be round,"  
and wrote it on a card.

I think it was the only  
good thing I got  
from going back to school,  
except that my hatred of school  
drove me to make baskets.

The cold art teacher  
I offended by saying  
I wanted to mess around  
with stuff.

"We don't mess around,"  
she said haughtily,  
and the word stuff  
angered her as well.

I simply wanted  
to expand my territory.  
But as my daughter said,  
"What do you think  
this is - a school?"

Words were my domain,  
I felt free to use them  
as I chose,  
like experimenting  
with my hair.

That woman, who named  
herself after a color,  
and wore no other color

but that,  
was my last straw.  
Like a doctor,  
willing to talk to me  
only after I was  
properly degraded.

"I have backed my way into my life, a woman there said to me.  
I have re-acted my way into mine.

I took me thirty years  
to finish college  
and I can't think of a  
thing I learned.  
But it did provoke me  
to make baskets,  
to sit in a circle of people,  
wet reed rubbing my legs,  
to weave the cattails  
I picked in silence.

I have always believed in anti-dote.  
I went back to what was natural,  
making baskets to learn  
how to make my life  
with my own hands,  
wordless.

As now, when I  
rotate the reed vessel,  
cattails I picked  
woven in its bottom,  
as I hang it on the wall,  
searching for the  
round in the basket.

7/11/98

98poems/walking

## WALKING DEL DIOS

The yellow house at Quince had a good garden that year - early. I envied it on our Saturday walks. Too hot for me to want to work outside.

At her yard sale I bought a miniature linen-covered dress form used in stores to display jewelry. And pasted to its belly a two-inch scene I had cut out from a magazine. A cozy room with a fireplace where some woman sewed, a dress form with a tape measure draped around its neck standing in front of a winter window. I titled it "Woman Giving Birth To Herself."

The lady at Quince had a full-figure mannequin in her garden. A head or two on sticks marked the rows. An arm sprouted up from the zucchini.

Her house was a gangly thing close to the street with a eucalyptus garland wrapped around it, like a woman wearing pearls.

7/11/98

98poems/peeling

Peeling peaches I remember my father,  
the way he said to hold the peach  
under the tap.

I was forty then and didn't know.

Where was I when he gave  
this lesson the first time?

The truth is he hadn't  
given it before then.

They did not teach me things,  
but just expected me to know.

So that my ignorance  
always met with criticism,  
whose only lesson  
was to be afraid  
to learn.

7/22/98

98poems/tablecloth

I always buy a tablecloth  
when my husband visits  
his mother.  
Well, at least twice  
I have. With napkins.  
A hedge against loneliness.

Both times at a yard sale.  
The first a military family,  
a rather high rank with  
commodious quarters and good  
linens being transferred  
somewhere else.  
It was a tablecloth like  
one I already had. My favorite,  
which my sister always coveted.  
With a dozen napkins.

"The stain will come out  
with Biz," she said indignantly  
to my hesitation.  
I have often felt grateful  
I risked that tablecloth.  
We use the napkins almost  
daily. A pale teal,  
in a weave I don't  
know the name of,  
but it's very easy  
to care for.  
That blend of beauty  
and utility I try to build  
my life on.

He doesn't see it that way,  
of course, he thinks I err  
on the side of beauty  
and cast utility out  
the door.  
Which is not true,  
just look at us. It certainly  
has not always been pretty.

He is leaving tomorrow  
to visit his mother.  
Yesterday I stopped  
at a yard sale in an  
affluent neighbor.  
This year's tablecloth  
is red gingham with eight  
napkins. I hesitated  
over the small stain,  
as well as the price,  
but remembering the teal  
one I took a chance.  
It makes me feel I should  
open a pizza parlor, it makes  
me feel like I should have  
a large family over for  
pasta.  
I iron the wax drip  
from its corner,  
and soak it in Biz.

7/27/98



98poems/market

I am walking behind  
a woman in the super market,  
who looks like she should  
be a member of my family.  
Plain and large-boned,  
practical in her choice of shoes  
but with a bit of dash  
in her midriff-skimming top.

Her course gray hair,  
cropped close to her neck,  
reminds me of Aunt Dora,  
her fleshy upper arms of my  
Aunt Clara.

We are in the detergent  
aisle. Later I see her  
turn down toward cat food,  
as I overhear the conversation  
between a father and his daughter  
about soap. I stare at his feet,  
watch the daughter run her fingers  
along every item on the shelf,  
and think about family,  
as I always do in summer.

7/27/98

98poems/purple

In my last burst of youth  
I bought purple panties,  
an act, like most,  
visible only by looking back.

Some women hold on longer,  
like my sister in her sixties  
with magenta negligees.

I have long preferred cotton,  
even before middle age.  
And white next to my skin.

But that is not the point.  
There is that corner we turn  
when it is all different.  
We are different.  
Is that the reason  
for this odd anxiety,  
this strange nervousness,  
the fact that I don't  
understand where I am?

I bought purple panties  
that winter, with a matching bra  
that was a poor fit.  
I used to think it a regal color,  
I bought a lot of bras that winter.

But all that is settled now.  
I know which panties I wear,  
and the bras, when I can find them.  
I want to have these things  
figured out at last.

Strange men nag their wives  
after moving my daughter's  
underwear drawers. Her floral  
lingerie makes them want more  
from life.

And that is what drove me  
to purple, to an itchy synthetic  
fabric.

What does it matter now?  
I never had the underwear  
my daughter does. I can't  
think that I want it,  
but is that just giving up?  
And what exactly does that mean?  
What are the alternatives?  
Is it fighting or giving up,  
trying or giving up,  
resisting or giving up?  
If you aren't giving up  
what are you doing?

7/27/98

98poems/body

Our cat does not come home,  
if you don't find the body  
it's not as sad.

7/29/98

98poems/starving

The t.v. reporter said:  
There is a terrible silence  
in refugee feeding camps,  
starving children  
do not cry.

8/5/98

98poems/autumn

An hour of autumn  
early this morning  
and I get optimistic.  
Mid-afternoon  
a breeze from the window  
over my desk,  
at last.  
I have grown so old  
all I think about  
is the weather.  
The unendurable  
heat of summer,  
spring and fall,  
which we hardly  
ever have,  
and winter  
which I have  
forgotten.

9/15/98

98poems/sad

Anything I say  
will be sad  
so I remain silent,  
and try to avoid  
bumping into myself,  
in the form of  
old notes or letters  
or poems,

which though they  
read *reconcile*  
or *make* or *do*  
mean love and  
hope and dream,

and I know the truth  
of this,  
because the ink  
is green.

9/15/98

98poems/scrawny

I hate a scrawny tree,  
one that hasn't  
quite made up its  
mind to be a tree,  
like this bottle brush  
I look out on  
which doesn't bloom.  
And even the oak  
just past it,  
which isn't much  
as oaks go.

Not like the one  
in the yard  
of the house  
where I was born,  
whose branches  
stretched  
as wide as  
the house.  
At least as I  
remember it  
that day we  
went back, all  
of us but one,  
and stood beneath  
it, with husbands  
and wives,  
and daughters.  
My brother with  
a new burgundy  
Porsche, my sister  
still walking,  
but with a  
cane.

9/15/98



98poems/clothes

Her plaid dress  
reminded me of  
a two-piece cotton  
I wore at seventeen,  
though I have never  
liked plaids.  
I remember it,  
the way I do  
remember my clothes,  
because at any one  
moment there is  
something I am  
fiercely loyal to.  
Just now it is silk.

Back then there was  
the pink wool pleated  
with matching pullover.  
And the shoes I bought  
too large, because I  
needed something perfect  
for a date that night.  
I was always that way,  
short-sighted in my  
pursuit of perfection,  
so that it was mangled  
and twisted into something  
recognizable only as  
foolishness. Still it  
was perfection pushing me,  
however ill-informed.

It is was perfection too  
I saw in that soft pink purse  
I had in sixth grade, which  
I often recall as others might  
a memorable trip. Its shoes  
were not a perfect match,  
which always troubled me,  
of course.  
And the Easter suit

that accompanied it  
was never right  
at all.

I wrote a list once  
of favorite clothes  
I had thrown away,  
it was the only way  
I could let them go.  
I have often thought  
I do not own a wardrobe  
so much as marry  
certain garments.

Like that eggshell  
two-piece polished cotton  
in junior high.  
I always preferred  
co-ordinates, though  
I called them  
skirt and blouse.

I wish I could remember  
the belt, belts have  
always been more important  
than the dress,  
even now it's true.  
Accessories, well -  
everything is in  
the details,  
and always  
has been.

And white tennies,  
I think that's what  
we wore then -  
except for the lucky  
girl who had them  
in every color.  
Wasn't that everyone's  
dream -  
red tennis shoes  
and green.

He wore levis and  
a shirt with the sleeves  
rolled up.

It might have been  
our only date,  
shortly thereafter  
he took up with  
someone his own  
age, my friend said  
because she was ready.

We always called her  
by her last name  
with a tone that  
did nothing to  
bring him back.

I always considered  
the outfit lucky,  
the way athletes do,  
but really after that  
it never was.

9/15/98

98poems/newmoon

New moon in Virgo,  
what to throw away?  
A skirt I just bought  
which my skin does  
not like.

That red cookbook  
I've wanted to be rid  
of for years, except  
when I'm making  
blueberry pie.

Better still to be rid  
of this numb thumb,  
which makes my world  
something I no longer  
want to touch,  
which renders corn  
chips a torture,  
an emery board  
an impossibility.  
It is only happy  
now when it is  
clenching a pen,  
but then it always  
was.

9/15/98

98poems/streetsweeper

Street sweeper,  
a rare sight  
in my neighborhood,  
creeps past the window  
I look out from,  
reminding me the  
street is there.  
I prefer to think  
there is only the oak,  
and the fern growing  
up the pepper tree  
next door,  
the sun's glare  
on the roof  
across the field.

Spider webs  
enshroud my new  
house, as I had  
hoped they would  
not. Their sticky  
mass collects against  
the window glass,  
tenacious filaments  
spanning, beam to beam,  
all around the eaves.  
Perhaps I did not move  
far enough away.  
I dream of that place  
still where the air  
is moist and I am  
always happy just  
to see the trees,  
even though they  
are dying.

9/15/98

98poems/truth

In the rooms  
where truth lives  
I always think  
of you.

9/19/98

98poems/silk

All the things I love  
are the color of honey,  
my apple cider vinegar  
the earrings I always wear,  
the silk clothes,  
which are my particular  
version of saffron robes.

Honey, is God's favorite food.  
I, of course, prefer mangoes.  
But left on a desert isle  
it is honey, I would take.

Silk is God's favorite cloth,  
she likes it best  
when it is honey-colored.  
I wear it so I can travel  
light.

9/19/98

98poems/legumes

URAD DHAL

I feel overwhelmed  
by too many grains,  
the things I'm sure  
I'll remember  
the names of,  
but months later  
hold up to the light  
wandering:  
*Is this buckwheat?*

Now and then I try to  
expand, reading  
some cookbook,  
trying to follow some  
Way.  
I considered macrobiotics  
because I loved Mrs. Kushi's  
spiritual approach to food.  
Something I threw  
against the wall  
that didn't stick,  
but left strange bottles  
on the kitchen shelf,  
oils and vinegars  
I never used.

Yesterday I brought my  
food jars out of the  
Lazy Susan,  
a dark corner I knew  
would not work for me,  
which made consciousness  
too hard to hold on to.

I need a life  
more kinesthetic  
than that.  
No wonder I  
didn't eat all



summer,  
I didn't know  
what food I had.

Now that I do  
I realize what  
must get tossed,  
and commit myself  
anew,  
to my long grain brown,  
my beloved basmati,  
and - it goes  
with out saying -  
oats.

In legumes, as well,  
I need simplicity.  
What was I thinking  
when I bought  
toor dhal -  
or this dreadful  
yellow split mung  
which smells so  
I cannot cook it.  
Urad urad urad  
do.  
I just can't  
get used to you.

Brown lentils leave  
me wanting something  
pretty to see,  
but red lentils -  
red lentils  
always please me.  
Mung beans,  
black beans,  
now and then  
pintos properly  
cooked,  
black eye peas  
on New Year's,  
at least.

When it comes  
to fruits and vegetables  
I want no limitation,  
except what  
I'm not in the mood  
to eat.  
But I only want  
a few of them in the  
fridge at once.

Meditation, writing, walk.  
Abhyanga then bath.  
House and garden,  
errands in the world.  
And in the afternoon  
I write.

Virgo. I remake  
myself as I do  
each year,  
I am doing it  
with fewer grains,  
not so many  
legumes.

9/19/98

98poems/1strain

A cool breeze through  
the window, the season's  
first rain.  
Leaves turn red.  
From here  
the metallic car cover  
across the field  
gives the appearance  
of a New England country  
barn.

9/26/98

98poems/pockets

Should I out live him,  
it is his pockets  
I will remember.  
His money in a random  
way between the 3x5  
cards he always carries,  
in different colors,  
but not coded as I would  
try to do.  
And used as he does use things  
- to death, front and back  
before thrown away.  
Something both in his ancestral  
memory and his individual nature,  
and thus, unbreakable.  
Everything written down,  
what he overhears  
and wants to save, as he does  
save things - everything.  
All that I have sent him to  
the store for, in the recent  
and far past.  
Calculations, and since  
I have trained him to do so,  
every penny that he has  
spent.

10/7/98

98poems/Joann

You would be wearing black,  
you said, when we first met,  
"a gray haired little old lady,"  
but I knew better  
by your voice.

You were love  
at first sight,  
perhaps the only one  
I didn't live to regret.

I gave Venus the credit  
for that,  
or our love of baths  
and shoes - and shiny dresses,  
which is, of course,  
all one in the same.

And then again,  
I thought it was  
because we shared  
the important things  
and skipped the trifling ones,  
something I'd been trying  
to do for years.

I needed you,  
I guess,  
for that.

And other things:  
the due you so graciously,  
give others,  
and almost never  
claim for yourself.

Kinship of the realest kind,  
which asks neither  
blood nor reason.

Your sharp wit,

which made me remember  
my own, neglected  
like a forgotten hobby.

The joy you take  
in sharing a good story,  
as some women would  
a beauty secret,  
that way you have  
of cutting right through it,  
as though it were  
a piece of cloth.

I think, perhaps,  
you are the last  
honest woman.  
And yet you always say  
the just right thing.

It is sustenance  
of the sort I need,  
knowing beauty and grace -  
words we can rarely use,  
but no other words will do -  
are woven through you,  
the warp and woof  
of who you are.

Not that I always  
think of it just  
like that,  
but there it is -  
the way the eye  
knows where to expect  
the bouquet in the room,  
or the fingers seek  
the satin at the edge  
of the blanket.

10/9/98

98poems/mygod

My God is  
a sod woman,  
grandmotherly  
and still strong.

She likes the smell  
of sage on her hands,  
her toes powdered  
with dust  
from the trail  
where she walks.

She puts her fingers  
in the food  
when she cooks,  
her vegetables  
carried to the kitchen  
with soil still on  
the roots.

She likes earrings  
that jingle  
and full, swishy  
skirts that sway  
when she walks.

She laughs from deep  
in her belly  
and has a keen wit -  
do not try  
to put anything  
over on her.

She cries  
when she needs to  
or feels it -  
when the mood  
hits.

She taught  
Sophia Loren

to rub olive oil  
on her skin,  
her beauty secrets  
are nearly endless.

She hands out courage  
like peppermint candies  
from the pockets  
of her skirt,  
you can never tell  
what she may pull  
from her baskets or bags,  
what she may have  
tied in her scarves.

She always carries  
things - as females do,  
gifts and food  
and flowers,  
tidbits of this and that  
and tips on better living.

She loves to give  
everything she has  
away,  
"I picked this up  
just for you -  
I thought it was  
your color."

She has a certain taste  
for contradiction  
and irony,  
which explains  
both botany  
and men.

She prefers one pot  
meals, knowing  
the road to redemption  
is not paved  
with cleaning up.



She likes skirts  
that tie in a nice  
neat knot, instead  
of hanging up,  
she thinks  
it is, perhaps,  
her best idea  
ever.

She has to live  
lean in order to stay  
so abundant.

Time is a necklace  
she strands  
beneath the tree  
in summer,  
just to remember  
its touch  
on her skin.

She is roused  
by the clap of  
thunder,  
charged by the  
moon turned full.

She falls in love  
at first sight  
and stays there.  
She knows her lover  
by his rhythm  
and scent.

She lives for motion  
and sound, which is why  
we have wind and birds.

She likes short words  
and simple punctuation,  
she does not traffic  
in semi-colons,  
or bother with footnotes.

She wrote her autobiography  
before she lived her life,  
she thinks that we should  
do the same,  
create the story  
and then live it.

She squats to give  
birth,  
the hum of the Earth's  
engine begins to whirl,  
all the flowers bloom  
at once,  
mud hens rustle  
to life,  
seeking water,  
you and I  
and  
all of it  
becomes.

10/8/98

Melancholy slides  
over me  
like a satin slip.  
A gray day  
in a house with  
no fireplace,  
time charging  
into winter.  
There is nothing  
I can do  
to slow it down  
to something  
I might manage,  
my only salvation,  
this very moment.  
I had intended  
to arise today  
in the pursuit  
of greatness,  
but find myself  
at the kitchen sink  
getting stains  
on my new shirt,  
my first cold  
of the season  
muddling my mind.  
I decide I need  
a master plan,  
a list of lists,  
just to clear  
my head of these  
erroneous details.  
A few words  
come to me,  
I grab on to them  
and hold on for dear  
life, this very dear  
life slipping away  
from me,  
like a satin

slip sliding  
to the floor.

10/21/98

98poems/regretting

Across the street  
the sun is shining,  
I am regretting my life,  
contrasting wants  
and needs, weighing,  
not the decisions themselves,  
but the basis for them.

The five-toed cat wants out.  
So do I, but there's no one  
here to open the door,  
or show me where it is.

He says, "It's the time of year,"  
no comfort to me, as usual.  
On t.v. a grandmother rides  
off in the night on a Harley.  
That would not do for me.

Last night's popcorn  
lingers on the counter,  
the popcorn always fails  
now that I cook electric.  
The compost begins to smell.

I am profoundly lonely  
for my life,  
the one that eludes me,  
obscured by the details,  
like a bright bloom  
submerged in the wax  
of a candle.

There are things I wish I knew  
but can't, Road-Not-Taken views  
I have no way to see.  
But that is too cliché  
to talk about.

The morning mist curtains my house,  
I retaliate by eating popcorn.

11/18/98

98poems/berry

The early morning sun  
on the oak tree  
across the street,  
it seems to be  
only nature  
I can speak of  
now, holding myself  
separate from that.  
Apart.

The red truck  
in the distance  
blends with its  
background,  
like a berry on a  
bush.

11/18/98

ACACIA

Every January  
the acacia blooms.  
That being so,  
I place a photo  
of one in the album,  
as I contemplate  
this life I document,  
no trace that I have  
lived it.  
The same shots,  
year after year,  
of the cats on the couch,  
my husband opening gifts,  
in that sweater  
his mother bought  
before she quit shopping.

My daughter left  
her boyfriend  
because his family  
asked her to  
step out of the photo.  
There were other  
reasons, of course,  
but this is the one  
I always remember.  
A fourth child,  
I have never much  
been photographed.

I sort and shape  
pages and pages  
of his visiting relatives,  
his trips out of town.  
There are no photos  
of me in the album.  
I start excluding  
the ones I take  
unless it is a



a family member.

Who should wonder  
that I roam the woods  
looking for faces  
in the bark of the trees,  
that December finds me  
waiting  
for the acacia  
to bloom.

12/28/98

Margin Notes

I wish I had made  
more margin notes  
as I moved through my life.  
So that looking back  
I would know,  
if not what mattered,  
what I thought of it then.  
The sort of thing  
that would easily lend  
itself to the tidiness  
of memoir.  
All those phases like  
"and then I knew,"  
or "I always wanted to be..."  
or "I had this plan from  
the beginning."  
Quick summations that  
would help me deceive myself  
into believing that my life  
has been anything but a  
random bouncing off walls.  
My friend calls it one  
step forward and two back,  
but in my life it has been  
heading East for three days,  
and then veering south  
and then southeast,  
then east again.  
There is a slow progress  
of sorts, but a complete  
loss of memory of where  
I was going and why,  
what changed my mind  
and, hence, my direction,  
so that I don't notice  
how many times I shift back  
onto old ground.

I wish I had made more

notes, or that the ones  
I had made were more useful,  
I am weary of finding myself  
again and again someplace I  
have already been, and just now  
realized by the mileage marker.

12/30/98