

Poetry Series

**Alan balter**  
**- poems -**

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# Alan balter(5-25-39)

## Author Biography

Alan Balter

Alan Balter was born in Chicago and attended the Chicago Public Schools. He matriculated at the University of Illinois in Urbana in 1956 and earned a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology (1960) and a Master's Degree in Special Education (1962). He taught adolescents with developmental delays at Niles Township High School West for two years before returning to the University of Illinois and completing a Ph.D. in Special Education in 1968. While completing his degree, he taught undergraduate courses at the University of Illinois.

He worked as the Director of Secondary Special Education Services in Skokie, Illinois (Niles Township High Schools) before joining the faculty in the Special Education Department at Chicago State University. There, over a tenure of 32 years, he prepared teachers for children and adolescents with developmental delays, learning disabilities, and emotional disorders.

Dr. Balter has published two nonfiction books: *Divided Apple: A Story about Teaching in Chicago* and *Learning Disabilities: A Book for Parents*, both with Kendall-Hunt publishers. He has also published two novels: *Holden and Me* (Rockway Press) for which he received their international fiction award in 2006 and *Different Ways of Being* (Linkville Press). His essay, "Cruel and Unusual Endings," about physician assisted suicide, appeared in the Op-Ed section of the Chicago Tribune in 2000.

Dr. Balter and his wife Barbara, also a retired teacher, live in Northbrook, Illinois. They enjoy extensive travel and 14 grandchildren.

# Anybody Home?

Anybody Home?

Jimmy lived in a box underneath a bridge  
The previous occupant was a Maytag fridge  
His schedule was empty but for constant dread  
And conferences with strangers who lived in his head

Flashbacks of his buddies and their ghastly remains  
Limbs ripped from their bodies and holes in their brains  
Holding them close while their veins ran dry  
And coming to learn how much grown men cry

He made it through the night and got up at dawn  
Cursing the dark hours for lasting so long  
He frequented the restroom at a fast food place  
To wash the grit from his once handsome face

Jimmy took his breakfast 'neath the overpass  
Two ounces of rotgut from a plastic glass  
Then, to the street to beg at the curbstone  
With his unseen friends, he remained alone

He stopped working at dusk to count what he had  
Twenty quarters and a few dimes wasn't all that bad  
He spent his earnings at the corner liquor store  
For a hundred proof dinner he needed more and more

Jimmy died yesterday in his cardboard hell  
An overdose of antifreeze made his brain swell  
Russell grabbed his coat, and Thomas took his socks  
And a guy named Johnny moved into the box

Alan balter

# Either Way, It's Ok

Either Way, It's OK

Words spelled the same either way can be a real hoot  
Like civic, racecar, madam, radar, rotator and toot  
Spell them left or right and join right in the fun  
Try kayak, eye, level, a Toyota, or a nun

For clever kids, here's a question I feel obliged to raise  
Can you spell either way with an entire phrase?  
Here's Kaye a red nude, peeped under a yak  
Or even better: Campus motto, bottoms up Mac!

Dennis and Edna sinned, and God saw I was a dog  
Hey! Go hang a salami, I'm a lasagna hog  
I've been thinking: Was it Eliot's toilet I saw  
Some men interpret nine memos, I'm in a state of awe

One popped into my head while chewing on some gum  
Few men have committed murder for a jar of red rum  
Now it's your turn, so I'm leaving it to you  
But, let's not go to church, because we panic in a pew

But the only race I won was the dash home for dinner

In basketball, my aim was quite rotten  
Because I was thinking about sauerbraten  
And in games of soccer, I scored no goals  
How could I when dreaming about egg rolls?

Instead of practicing football each day  
I helped my mother trim a filet  
At tossing horseshoes I missed the stakes  
Though I really zeroed in on chocolate cakes

"Here's a couple of chairs, " the kids would tease  
When three steps uphill caused me to wheeze  
"Y'know, you're really a fine, fat fellow  
You'd look like a school bus if we painted you yellow

Still, I laughed through all their jokes and wisecracks  
While finding great comfort in four more Big Macs  
Of course, it was difficult to fit into my clothes  
Where do you find size 5X; nobody knows

Now it's five years later, and I'm lean as a blade  
I've lost one hundred-fifty; what progress I've made  
And all the old guys from school have gotten fat  
For Christmas they get yellow paint; imagine that

Fit or Fat

When I was a kid of seven or eight  
I ate everything that was on my plate  
Dad put me in sports; he wanted a winner  
But the only race I won was the dash home for dinner

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Because I was thinking about sauerbraten  
And in games of soccer, I scored no goals  
How could I when dreaming about egg rolls?

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# Evolution

Evolution

Regarding the dispute over evolution  
There are differing views about the solution  
Did we evolve from creatures lower than we  
Or were we created all at once by He?

It's not my purpose to change your mind  
Nor alter the theory to which you're aligned  
But here's an example to think about  
'Tho it may not be easy to figure out

We send our young men off to war  
Then, some off us forget what they're fighting for  
Sometimes what comes home are only dog tags  
So we bury their bodies and give their wives flags

And those who make it back to our borders  
Often suffer from psychiatric disorders  
Hallucinations, flashbacks, and terrible fears  
Plague them all the rest of their years

So when I think about Darwin's theory  
Sometimes I tend to walk away weary  
Who is more primitive is the question I see  
Is it the gorilla or is it we?

Alan balter



# I Met A Child

I Met a Child

I met a 'gator near the equator  
Out in the sunny hot weather  
He was terrified at the thought of his hide  
Becoming expensive shoe leather

I met a leopard eyeing a shepherd  
And drooling over his flock  
He was unsure as to whether his fur  
Wouldn't soon be a rich lady's frock

I met an elephant who thought it was relevant  
To hide away after dusk  
He hated to think it, but some folks like a trinket  
Carved right out of his tusk

I met a child out in the wild  
Searching around at dawn  
"Where are they? " he asked with a tear in his eye  
"Where have all the animals gone? "

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# Innies And Outies

## Innies and Outies

About halfway between your shoulders and knees  
You'll find your belly button  
If you take a quick look, you'll find it with ease  
Poke around and don't worry about nuttin'

It doesn't matter if you're fat or skinny  
When it comes to your belly button  
If it sinks in, you've got an innie  
But outies are made for juttin'

An innie is like a tiny crater  
It's a useful belly button  
Stick a golf club in there and use it later  
When it's time to do some puttin'

Hide salty peanuts or M and M's there  
In your innie belly button  
Share half of them with your teddy bear  
If he happens to be a glutton

But an outie sticking out has limited use  
As a helpful belly button  
Ask your doctor for an excuse  
For the bad job he did at cuttin'

Alan balter

# Tall Bobby Duvall

Tall Bobby Duvall

When Bobby Duvall was born in the fall  
He looked like a regular child  
But in no time at all, he was twelve feet tall  
Growing like a weed in the wild

He lived in a house on the second story  
That was facing to the north  
But when he stretched out in all his glory  
His head poked through on the fourth

He moved out west where the weather was best  
And near San Francisco one day  
He sat on the Golden Gate Bridge to rest  
And dangled his feet in the bay

Bobby kept on growing with incredible speed  
Never slowing for even a while  
Though it might be hard to believe indeed  
He lengthened to more than a mile

Bobby lay down at the age of fifty  
Still not fully grown  
His head on a pillow was mighty nifty  
With his feet in another time zone

Bobby Duvall lived to ninety-five  
Rambling from here to there  
There's a good chance he'd still be alive  
Except outer space has no air

Alan balter

# Which One Is Second Best?

Which One is Second Best?

My space is but a murky hole  
Where the air reeks of rot  
Thoughts echoing out of control  
What is real and what is not?

A dismal dawn of gloomy gray  
And a dusk that fades to black  
Will I make it anyway  
Dulled by doses of Prozac?

Fitful sleep is my escape  
Though littered with vivid dreams  
Of a bug-eyed boy with mouth agape  
A channel for his screams

Come sup with me; a rare cuisine  
A lethal diet of self abuse  
Entrees mixed with methamphetamine  
And desserts of "What's the Use? "

Like a fetus curled in bed  
With knees drawn to my chest  
Am I living or am I dead  
And which one is second best?

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