

Poetry Series

Chuck Toll

- poems -

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Chuck Toll

I was born in the South but raised in northern New England. I attended college on the East Coast, continued my studies on the West Coast, and have lived and worked in other parts of the country as well. Having enjoyed all of these experiences, I am geographically passionate, omnivorous and conflicted.

Blessed with a patient and loving wife, I also have two daughters, a son, a cat, a red slider turtle, a mellow son-in-law with a beautiful heart and graceful ways, and an impressively plucky mother who remains committed to drinking life to the lees as she approaches her 90th birthday. All possess skills and qualities I am trying to understand and incorporate into my own life with varying degrees of success. Growing is a matter of infinite hope and unflagging patience.

I prefer poetry that is neither esoteric nor inscrutable. My subjects are mostly familiar ones, and I try to keep my approach personal and accessible. I tend to use rhyme and meter to help me sharpen my own understanding about what it is I'm trying to express. Anyway, it's all fun - and a great alternative to Sudoku, crossword puzzles, gameboys, and morbid preoccupation with the evening news.

I welcome and greatly appreciate sincere feedback and suggestions that can help me grow in my writing.

Thanks to all of you who pause to read poems on my PoemHunter site. May you find the experience interesting and enjoyable. Best wishes!

All God's Children: The Barrier Islands

The long eastern curve of our coast is preserved
By a series of barrier islands.
The marshes and reaches of these offshore beaches
Keep most storm surge from striking the mainland.

A few islands seem like the substance of dream,
Where fisher folk toil in a land out of time.
Ragged towns ringed by marshes show a life that is harsh as
Their streets of crushed oysters and lime.

Far different from these are the Islands of Ease,
Where white yachts and estates are the lures.
Before manicured yards stand security guards
With instructions to repel all tours.

These people aren't better although they would rather
Spend time with each other, not you.
In compounds collected, aloof and protected,
They give "barrier" a meaning quite new.

They're the crème they suppose, but in fact la même chose,
So alike in their golfcarts and puces.
Round their sense of self worth, let us leave a wide berth
As they simmer like clams in their juices.

Chuck Toll

All God's Children: The Toxic Poster Child

Britney once seemed the poster child
For all a whole world she'd beguiled,
So cute and perky in her way,
And innocent as dawn of day.
Count on Brit to dress demurely
And be cooperative, never surly.
Moms and dads to kids would say,
"You could be like her some day!"

Then came the headlong fall from grace
As Britney shed her Mouseketeer face.
No point in listing the copious follies
She's found since trading in her dollies;
The booze and drugs and sleazy sex
Have turned once avid fans to ex.
She's hurtling now to self-destruction
Led by Paris and LiLo's instruction.

Displaying judgment and maturity
Better suited to a child of three,
Poor Brit, wishing to play the vamp
Instead transformed herself to tramp.
Now all she touches turns to worse;
She's still a poster child, but in reverse.
And worried moms and dads still say,
"You could end up like her some day!"

If watching Britney cruise aimlessly
Around in search of hot paparazzi
And cold frappacinos leaves you sad,
Her forlorn boys could drive you mad.
If only she could manage to be good
And tend her wee ones as she should!
Another American Idol down the drain,
It makes you wonder whom to blame.

Chuck Toll

All God's Creatures: Shipwreck

Heavily beached upon the bed,
Inert, eyes closed and body slack,
He lies attached by tubes and tape,
A bank of monitors at his back.

Perhaps he hears, the doctor says.
The coma should be slowly lifting.
But do our sounds mean anything?
Is there a purpose in his shifting?

Our vigil here is clearly marked
By duty more than love or choice.
The awkwardness in tone and touch
All speak with sad yet eloquent voice.

Dashed on the rocks by rolling seas
The tempests in his mind constructed,
What hope for him, or those of us
Whose feelings he so long obstructed?

Would that he grow well again,
Find love and peace, and seek to change
The pain his willful heart has brought
To all who've lived within his range.

If not, let's pray he finds a gentler breeze
And smoother, calmer waters as he goes
That he could not find in life to help
The little boats he held in tow.

Chuck Toll

All God's Creatures: Taxonomy of Winners and Losers

Some respect
Some reflect
Some correct
Some perfect
Some protect

But some don't
So they lose.

Some reject
Some neglect
Some suspect
Some dissect
Some object

But some won't
And they win.

Chuck Toll

All God's Creatures: Size Small

Peter is a little man.
I am not his biggest fan.

With hearty laugh and portly bust,
Pete's the type that people trust.
And he plays fair, or so he thinks
After downing several drinks.

Pete believes in shaking hands
to give you faith in where he stands.
But those who think his promise matters
Risk getting chewed to little tatters.

Alas, the truth and the conviction
Pete exudes prove mostly fiction.
For inside lurks a nasty beast
Quite prepared on you to feast.

Pete wants, above all else, to please
The circle where he feels at ease.
Driven by what these people say,
Right and wrong hold little sway.

Too lazy to sort out the facts,
Pete rarely thinks before he acts.
His order? Ready, fire, aim!
All's well if he diverts the blame.

What prompts him to behave this way?
You'd have to go inside to say.
Pete's motives he cares not plumb.
Could he be both bad and dumb?

Why don't people call his bluff
And holler, "Pete, that's quite enough! "
The group with whom he likes to swim
Are for the most part just like him.

Chuck Toll

All God's Creatures: The American Dream

'Even my worst days as attorney general
have been better than my father's best days.
I have lived the American dream.'

- Alberto Gonzales
United States Attorney General

What's that you say, Gonzales gone,
No more to tread the White House lawn?
It's true, Al's chosen to resign,
Get out of town while there was time.

The president, seeing naught amiss
That Al so quickly could dismiss
The rule of law and fudge the truth,
Instead blamed politics uncouth.

But blatantly had Al transgressed,
And politicians right and left
For once found common cause in calling
For his departure, no more stalling.

Al's father, who worked out of doors,
Came home each day with sweat and sores.
Though Al in dirtier work was caught,
He kept well groomed as he'd been taught.

Let hindsight find Al made a botch
Of most that happened on his watch.
At least he, with his little smile,
Could claim he lived "the Dream" a while.

Chuck Toll

Coyote and Frog (Native American)

Coyote and his friends walked to a pond
But found Frog and his clan now living there.
"This pond is small for all of us, " Frog said.
" Find water of your own. We cannot share."

"If you will let us drink our fill and bathe,
I'll get you a warm blanket and a blue stone
That's bigger than your fist, " Coyote offered.
When Frog agreed, Coyote went for them alone.

Frog took the gifts and led them to the pond.
Later as they left Frog laughed, "Good trade! "
In fact, Coyote stole the gifts from Thunderbird,
Now furiously tracking prints the thief had made.

Coyote returned next day to find the Frog clan dead.
He took his people to the pond. "Good trade, " he said.

Chuck Toll

Coyote and the Cattle (Native American)

Coyote was walking near a herd of cattle
When Bobcat, lying hidden in a tree, leaped
Onto a cow and wrestled her to the ground.
He cut her life quickly and began to eat.
"Teach me how! " Coyote begged Bobcat,
Who laughed, "It's harder than it may appear."
But he showed him how to do it, then added.
"Be sure you choose a cow and not a steer! "

Coyote climbed the tree and lay there flat,
But no cows walked beneath and he grew bored.
So when a steer at last came close, he leapt.
Coyote's claws were not the claws of Bobcat.
He lost his grip and fell, and the angry steer gored
Him with its long horns for the assault so inept.

Chuck Toll

Coyote Catechism

We neither pity other creatures nor feel sorry
for ourselves. Life does what it must, so do we.

We accept what there is: snakes, bugs, mice,
Squirrels, hares, trash and cats—all are nice.

We build our dens well hidden and secure,
Each made with double exits to be sure.

We honor females' right to choose their mate;
We pair for life and share a common fate.

We keep our tails down, but our eyes are up.
We teach a wise discretion to each pup.

Imperatives of Life we honor and fulfill.
If we must chew off a paw in a trap, we will.

We will not die with music left inside unsung.
The nights will hear our voices, old and young.

Chuck Toll

Coyote Crossing

Why did the coyote cross the road?

To show the turtles and armadillos,
The cottontails and prairie dogs,
The raccoons and opossums,
The rattlesnakes and tarantulas,
The cats and prairie chickens,
The jackrabbits and antelope,
The cattle and the sheep,
The wolves and ground squirrels,
The deer and carrion-eating bugs,
And the good old boys and girls
Weaving slowly homeward
From the tavern down the road

That it could be done.

Chuck Toll

Coyote Meets Smallpox (Native American)

Riding home, Coyote saw a man dressed all in black
Who was holding a large bag and sitting on a stone
Beside the trail. Drawing closer, he could see
The face was a skull, the rest of him just bones.

"Ya T'ey. You're Coyote, aren't you?" said the skeleton,
I am Smallpox. I was coming to visit your village today
With this bag of warm blankets from the paleface women
At the fort. Then I got lost. Can you show me the way?"

Looking from the skeleton to the bag, Coyote said
"I just left the village. I'm hunting deer and have their track."
Smallpox said thanks, lifted the bag, and set off the way
Coyote had come. "I'll see you when you get back."

When he was gone, Coyote headed home at a race
To move his village quickly to a new and safer place.

Chuck Toll

Coyote Moon

The experts claim coyotes do not yelp
At the moon. Instead, they use yips to help
Find partners or assert which land is theirs
Before they leave to hunt singly or in pairs.
But their nightly chorus could also express
A welcome pause in living's harsh caress,
Much as we find comfort joining in communion
And in responsive readings. Does the moon
Enrapture with its display of shapes and shadows,
Mysteriously pungent smells and furtive sounds,
And other half-sensed clues of creatures fleeing?
How life is built on death this moonscape shows
And leads coyotes, through their febrile songs,
To embrace the night, embrace their being.

Chuck Toll

Coyote Ugly

"I saw that film 'Coyote Ugly, " but I just didn't get the humor, " the coyote grouched to his therapist.
"Would waking up next to someone who looked like us be so disgusting you'd chew off your arm To escape before he woke up? Actually, I think We're rather sexy, in a dignified, furry sort of way. And what's with calling those barmaids 'coyotes' For dancing on the bar and shaking their little tushes? We don't go in for that. The only other coyote film At Blockbuster was 'Calling All Coyotes, ' with a jerk Named Randy showing nasty ways to lure us into his Crosshairs. Well, they had Roadrunner cartoons too, with Wylie Coyote playing the fool, as always. Jeez! I tell you, we need lobbyists and a smart ad campaign! "

Chuck Toll

Coyote Ugly 2

It was partway through the coyote's fifth session
That he had his revelation. He leaped up and howled,
But being a coyote, not a wolf, he sounded more like
That noisy Chihuahua in 3d that he'd been hankering
To sink his teeth into some dark night in the hallway
"It's jealousy that makes them so cruel! , " it yelped.
'We live our lives where they just think about living theirs.
We don't waste much time on rules or warning signs;
Their world is full of red lights and speed limits and signs
With diagonal stripes, and cops ready to bust them,
And bosses making their lives miserable, and presidents
Marching them off to fight people they've got no beef with.
We roam; they're tied to four bedroom, two and a half bath
Mortgages. No wonder they're jealous, the poor bastards! "

Chuck Toll

Coyote Visits a Fort (Native American)

Coyote and Dog watched the fort from the hill.
"I have everything I need in my new home,"
Dog said. "Come, I will show you what to do."
They walked past the guard at the stockade gate.

The fort was dusty and full of human noise.
They had to be alert for hooves and boots.
Dog drank from a muddy puddle, then showed
The stables where he slept. A boy threw a rock.

Coming to the kitchen, Dog wagged his tail.
He gazed up hopefully at a man cutting meat.
He whimpered and rubbed against the man's leg.
The man gave Dog a scrap and shooed him away.

Coyote watched more, then grabbed a slab of bacon,
Left by a hole in the fence, and returned to his family.

Chuck Toll

Coyote Ways

Coyotes are perhaps best known for flaunting
Boundaries of every sort. Most folks agree
Their behavior does not showcase healthy family
Values. To challenge such consensus is daunting.

Coyotes mate for life, or till their pups are grown,
And faithful they remain. Even alpha leaders
Who could assert their choice in breeders
Instead respect others' unions, and their own.

Coyote couples are domestic to the core.
They tend their pups between their labors,
Nuzzle often, rarely feud with neighbors,
Hold sing-alongs in the moonscape they adore.

Wary of man's world but certainly not quitters,
Coyotes don't run, they just bear larger litters.

Chuck Toll

Coyotes and the Future

Like ants and weeds, coyotes don't seem to know
Their place. They mock attempts to break their will.
Despite fences, guns and poisoned bait, they still
Do well in nooks and crannies that scarcely show.

Though drain canals and alleyways cannot equal
The pulsing prairie world that they've replaced,
Their little suffices to support this tribe displaced
Who stand ready for their bit part in the sequel.

Perhaps they wonder, given the growing throng,
Why bipeds seem so bound in ways perverse
To take life's challenges and make them worse
Instead of learning to play nice and get along.

If plants and insects finally win survival's race,
I'll put my bet on coyotes for strong third place.

Chuck Toll

Coyotes and Wildlife Services

There's something subversive, even socialist, about
The way coyotes scrounge their livelihood for free.
Ranchers, who lease public lands for nominal fee
Then post them as their own, want them driven out.

Certain of these feral freeloaders' depredations,
Ranchers dismiss the studies showing that herds
Are not affected by coyotes as patently absurd
And lobby for ever-greater government protections.

More than a century ago, Wildlife Services was created
To dispatch predators that, in owners' minds, obstructed
The exercise of American free enterprise they conducted
On public and private lands. The ranchers were elated.

Agency expenses, including workers and their bosses,
are publicly funded and far exceed the ranchers' losses.

Chuck Toll

Coyotes and Wildlife Services 2

Ranchers like to think of Wildlife Services
As a private club. In fact, it is a larger pawn
There for all who nature's footprint on the lawn
Leaves feeling vulnerable and nervous.

Wildlife Services does not trap and relocate.
Its methods, like its mission, are meant to kill.
Yet neither reports that prove its lack of skill
Nor environmental cautions produce debate.

The program's problems? Faulty dictums
That miss the interplay of wildlife populations,
And killing methods that cause the decimation
Of living things not even the intended victims.

Glad wolves and pumas are gone they may be,
But coyotes are unenthused about the agency.

Chuck Toll

Coyotes Cross the Border

The coyote was annoyed the van was late.
A dusty cloud, though, signaled its approach,
And soon Ramon was there and beckoning
Those inside. Nine shapes in all climbed out.

"Coň o! " The man stared balefully at the old couple,
The heavily pregnant woman, the two children.
A slow trip tonight. "You know we walk ten miles? "
They nodded stolidly as Ramon took their money.

The grimy bills and coins had bought this chance
To stumble through the dark at risk of nightmares
Animal and human. They prayed they'd found
An honest guide who would not rob or leave them.

The man tossed his beer can Into the twilight silence
And motioned the group to take their packs, "Vamos."

Chuck Toll

Coyotes in the City: Key West

"Mother and I had hoped to come here years ago, "
Old Coyote raised his `rita, silently saluting his mate,
"But with the annual litter, all those mouths to feed,
We always seemed to have too much on our plate.

"But when the population boom exploded everywhere,
The stupid wolves, bear and cougars refused to lie low.
What did they expect, scaring people silly eating livestock?
And suddenly all our natural predators-gone at a blow!

"It felt like winning a trip to Disney World, only better!
I admit, the Seven Mile Bridge stumped us for a while,
But that hurricane alert that forced evacuation of the Keys
Invited us to slide on down. The memory makes me smile.

"We do miss the Northern Lights from time to time
But sunsets here, and the Green Flash! Ah, sublime!

Chuck Toll

Coyotes in the City: Los Angeles

Coyotes roam the canyons of concrete,
Sniffing into bushes and drainage tunnels
Leaving prints and scat on muddy runnels.
Seldom can you see them from the street.

Pushed into the interstices by fate
In a lifeless world not of their creation
They survive by wit and adaptation
And each is faithful to its mate.

At night they crawl through tears in fences.
Perhaps a garbage bag may yield a bone,
Or they may find a pet left out alone.
Their let their search be guided by their senses.

Patient, they make do until the time when
The land beneath the moon be theirs again.

Chuck Toll

Coyotes in the City: New York

Kayaking on the East River, my daughter
Met a coyote swimming and offered help.
It declined, adding it needed the exercise.

City life is always like that, it complained,
Squirrel snacks and greasy handouts everywhere.
It was going to try Long Island before it burst.

My daughter said she hadn't known coyotes
Lived in Manhattan or out on Long Island.
"Been in the Big Apple for years," it puffed.

Long Island, it explained, was the last stop
On their list, which is why it was headed there.
And anyway, it wanted to see the Hamptons.

"The missus and I are planning to do Key West
Next year if we just get by Seven Mile Bridge."

Chuck Toll

Coyotes in the City: The Capitol

A National Geographic piece on coyotes
In Rock Creek Park unleashed a flood
Of agents from the FBI, BLM and HUD,
Plus reporters dispatched for sequel stories.
The city's angry citizens demanded
Eradication of beasts that lurked and stole.
Discovering one cowering in a badger hole,
They wanted it to Wildlife Services remanded.

With skills acquired in its new environs,
The coyote demanded legal aid and phone,
Ignored subpoenas, claimed it was a legal resident.
Lawyered up, it said it would rather wear leg irons
Or be eaten by lions than endure committees drone
Or mendacious speeches by the president.

Chuck Toll

Coyotes in the Suburbs

"There goes the neighborhood, " coyotes mutter
Under the old mesquite. They hear the sounds
Of human traffic and eye new stucco mounds
That now deface their canyon with a shudder.

The world of man does not bear close inspection:
The wives seem brash and loud, as do their spouses.
And judging from the racket in the houses,
Their cubs need stronger guidance and correction.

"But let's be fair, they've brought along their rats
And trash cans redolent with unseen treats
Just begging to be emptied on the streets.
And we can hope they'll share their cats...."

In trade for uncouth noise and ways untoward
The new arrivals brought their smorgasbord.

Chuck Toll

Coyotes in the Wild

Coyote thrive because they are not picky
About their diet. What they find, they eat:
Mice, snakes, bugs, frogs, and for a treat
Berries or cactus pears so sweet and sticky

Relaxed and clever scavengers since youth,
They love their daily outings, staying clear
Of ornery prey like cattle, elk and deer
With sufficient size to harm by horn or hoof.

Coyotes also know to keep away
From carnivores that might eat them instead.
But puma, wolf and bear hides tacked on sheds
Suggest a single threat remains today.

Coyotes are on the run, some ranchers think.
But who will adapt, who more apt to go extinct?

Chuck Toll

Coy-Wolves and Coy-Dogs

The joke about how porcupines mate applies
As well to other species where inept suitors
Get eaten in flagrante by their chosen ladies.
Coyotes, who gently pair for life, are shrewder.
But live evolves, pushed on by nature, man,
Or God. We hear of conduct less discreet
And strange hybrid offspring, coy-wolves and
coy-dogs. Gray wolves still like coyote meat
But are now so few that, finding a coyote female,
They may decline the meal and choose to mate.
Likewise coyotes meeting female dogs in heat
May go for option B. If such practices prevail,
No one will wind up eaten, and the spate
Of mongrel pups could integrate the species.

Chuck Toll

Family and Friends: The Geezer's Lament

Four score and more can be a drag.
I've watched my face in mirrors sag.
My fiber diet makes me gag.
Alas, my tail has lost its wag.

When I was young my abs were cut
And girls all liked my shapely butt.
Alas, my girth so broad has got
When playing golf I only putt.

It used to be that I could drink
A half a bottle in a blink.
Now two shots take me to the brink
Where I can neither walk nor think.

In manly skills I once felt certain.
Mondays found me spent and hurtin'.
Then John Thomas drew the curtain;
I'm now reduced to merely flirtin'.

When we bought, the price was right.
Our house was sturdy and build tight,
But now with bedrooms up a flight
The sofa is my bunk at night.

Seems I've misplaced my senses five.
My reflex time is in a dive,
So mostly I no longer drive.
(I'd like to reach the grave alive.)

Despite the mounting evidence
Do not assign me to past tense.
I've lost my supple, not my sense
(unlike some recent presidents) .

I'm much relieved that I'm retired.
I may get bored but can't be fired.
No boss, by bottom line inspired,
Outsourcing me to foreign hired.

And though our amorous nights are done,
My wife still calls me honeybun;
Old friends despite their aches stay fun
Though most weigh in at half a ton.

I've got a nice routine, and happily
See kids and grandkids frequently.
(But gameboy screens they show to me
To put it simply, I can't see!)

Chuck Toll

Family and Friends: Welcome Back to School

I'm very pleased to introduce to you
A teacher who is and isn't new.
Though new to some of you today
Last year he joined our work and play.

He's from the state of Oregon
But don't look there 'cause he's long gone.
He lived a while in Mexico,
But that, as well, was long ago.

Then ten years teaching on Unalaska,
Now where the heck is that? You ask.
An island far up north, where Inuit tribes
Eat seal and go on dog-sled rides.

When he joined our school last year
This man brought smiles & jokes & cheer.
Some mornings he'd share a song or two.
At Halloween his head was blue!

Last spring he left to be a nurse
Helping those with colds, or worse,
But found the nursing life last fall
Not what he wanted, after all.

So back to us mid-year he's come.
I know you'll make him feel welcome—

Mr. F

Chuck Toll

Family and Friends: Pushing the Envelope

An unusual woman
With talents to spare,
Andi loves pastimes
Both common or rare.

Crossword puzzles she guzzles,
Card games and Sudoku too,
From quilting to dancing
There's naught she can't do.

She's deadly at word games,
Mathematic ones too.
Her caramels draw raves,
She can even make stew.

But her talented nature
Can both fizzle and lag
When the challenge lies outside.
At the door she will sag.

Outdoor adventures
Are just not her thing.
There her confidence scatters
Like birds on the wing.

But beaching last summer
She left all astounded
When, grabbing kayak
And paddle, she bounded

Into the water, hopped in
And was gone with a smile.
Farther and farther,
Well over a mile.

Across the bay she went bobbing
Where sports craft roar through
Till she and her kayak
Were quite lost from view

O woe! ! Where is Andi?
Who hates outdoors sweat?
Should we call out the Coast Guard?
We don't see her yet.

Then a speck on the waters
Slowly hove into view.
Like finding Livingston in Africa,
T'was too good to be true

But on reaching the shoreline
To massive applause.

Andi tipped over,
We don't know the cause.

As she lay in the shallows,
She said, "You know, Life is grand
Though it seems I've forgotten
What is needed to stand.

'Now that I've turned fifty,
Quite beyond expectation,
Whatever I do should be
Cause for elation.

'But this end to my voyage
Still seems somehow fitting,
Reminding us all
That my forte is knitting."

So Andi's not Wonder Woman
But still mighty plucky.
Her adventure was epic
Despite landing unlucky.

To compare Andi's voyage
with that of Kon Tiki
might seem hyperbolic
but so what if it's cheeky?

Chuck Toll

Family and Friends: Swimming Lesson

Enough! bellowed Father,
I've had it to here!
The bickering must stop.
We need more good cheer!

Can't a man live in peace
In his house without rant?
For once just be civil,
Don't tell me you can't.

You're sisters, for God's sake!
You all should be friends.
So stop splitting your time
Between feuds and amends.

You're making me bonkers
Driving me to the bottle
And I'm starting to dream
About four I might throttle.

Ellen and Sherry,
You know proper behavior,
So help Laura and Andi
Knock it off. Be their savior!

If you four wash the dishes
A full month without fighting,
I'll buy you a pool.
Doesn't that sound exciting?

The daughters agreed
That a pool would be nice
So they pledged to display
Only sugar and spice.

But the plan only lasted
Through day number two.
The twins went at it again
Before you could say boo.

Ellen and Sherry,
Saw themselves treated poorly:
How was it their fault
The twins were so surly?

Not their fault, they protested
That the twins were like cats
Genetically programmed
For hissing and spats.

They never considered
An alternate way:

Do the dishes themselves
Send the twins off to play.

Had the older two sisters
done the dishes sans whining,
All four could have been swimming
Right after their dining.

But Father himself
Deserved part of the blame
For making an offer
The girls couldn't attain.

So through many hot summers
they all sweated and steamed
With the cooling pool waters
Just mirages they dreamed.

Over time, though, they learned
How support can be good,
And began treating one another
As four sisters should.

They're reconciled now
Though it's forty years later.
Their new, gentler ways came
Too late for their pater.

But I'm sure, looking down,
He is happy to see
His girls grown together
And nice as could be.

Chuck Toll

Fibbing: Best Friend

A
Dear
Best friend
Can heal all
Except for herself.
So many she helps grow forward,
Then retires to her empty bed of restless pain.

(Based on the Fibonacci sequence, so the number of syllables
in each line of the poem is the sum of the previous two lines:
1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34, etc.)

Chuck Toll

Fibbing: Boe

Boe
Our
First cat
Is dead now,
But memories of
His strange, quirky ways will remain
Etched in our hearts and poorly healed scratches forever.

(Based on the Fibonacci sequence, so the number of syllables
in each line of the poem is the sum of the previous two lines:
1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34, etc.)

Chuck Toll

Fibbing: Good News and Bad News

A-
Fib
Beating
Lacks meaning
And fails to function
Forcing blood throughout the system.
Cumadin can control a-fib - if used forever.

(Based on the Fibonacci sequence, so the number of syllables
in each line of the poem is the sum of the previous two lines:
1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34, etc.)

Chuck Toll

Fibbing: In the Fall

One
Of
The most
compelling
rationales for us
To take up xeric landscaping,
Our leaf-strewn lawn impatiently waits our attention.

(Based on the Fibonacci sequence, so the number of syllables in each line of the poem is the sum of the previous two lines: 1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34, etc.)

Chuck Toll

Fibbing: Observation

A
Rose
Grows tall
And straight by
Pushing its way through
The horizontal holes in a
Vertical trellace created by a gardener.

(Based on the Fibonacci sequence, so the number of syllables
in each line of the poem is the sum of the previous two lines:
1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34, etc.)

Chuck Toll

Fibbing: Peddling Away

Our
Son
Peddles
Down the drive
To the cul-de-sac.
Later he'll peddle off for good,
But for now it's comforting to know he'll soon be back.

(Based on the Fibonacci sequence, so the number of syllables in each line of the poem is the sum of the previous two lines: 1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34, etc.)

Chuck Toll

Fibbing: The Birthday Call

My
Son
Wishes
My daughter
A Happy Birthday,
Calling her at night on the phone.
Long distance by twenty years and a broken union.
Strange how sadness made and joined two lives whose bond
now twines so strongly across space and time.

(Based on the Fibonacci sequence, so the number of syllables
in each line of the poem is the sum of the previous two lines:
1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34, etc.)

Chuck Toll

Fibbing: The Way of the World

Fair
Is
Sadly
Not the way
Of the world, he says.
Perhaps, but she wishes it were,
And returns to cleaning her immaculate home.

(Based on the Fibonacci sequence, so the number of syllables in each line of the poem is the sum of the previous two lines: 1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34, etc.)

Chuck Toll

Fibbing: Defining Success

Our
Son's
First match
In wrestling
Was held yesterday.
Mom (a former athlete) was stressed.
Dad (though less involved in sports) proved even more a mess.
Calm throughout; our boy could not win, yet he refused to be pinned.

Chuck Toll

Fibbing: Near Weaver's Needle

At
Dawn
I saw
The tracks left
By a large cougar
Circling our tent during the night.
Until then, I'd been cautious about scorpions.

Chuck Toll

Fibbing: Truce

The
Moose
Silent
At twilight
In the mountain pond
Watched us approach without alarm.
It chomped calmly, water grasses dripping from its mouth.
While not inviting us to stay, it seemed to have no objection to our
presence there.
Later we serenaded it from our campfire, and from time to time its
sodden steps replied from the darkness beyond our flickering light.

(Based on the Fibonacci sequence, so the number of syllables in each line of the poem is the sum of the previous two lines: 1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34, etc.)

Chuck Toll

Lares et Panates: The Bedtime Story

Our young son wheezes softly in his sleep
In the middle of our bed, arms embracing
Stuffed animals, favorite blanket in hand.
For years, our bed has been his bed as well.

He knows his formal bedroom is elsewhere,
And he will go there if my wife and I insist.
But absent guests or relatives, we rarely do.
He always smiles on climbing in with us.

We talk and wonder about things. I read
The current book in progress, rub his back.
Then, almost between words, it is just
Soft breath, and his warmth between us.

Once he's asleep, our cat, quiet and still wary
From the rigors of his waking hours
Pads in to stare, knead him with her claws,
And sometimes lick his hair in place.

This arrangement will not last, of course;
Soon he will grow beyond us. My wife and I
Will reclaim the space he leaves behind.
But let him snuggle in with us a little longer

Safe and happy in knowing he's well loved,
Surrounded by his stuffed seal and other
Soft and loyal friends, the cat, and two who
Marvel still how one plus one makes three.

Chuck Toll

Lares et Penates: Boe the Cat

If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures,
then there was something gorgeous about him....

- Nick Carraway

Boe the Cat was not an easy cat to like
But then he did not like others either.

Blandishments carried no weight with Boe,
He bit or scratched at all who drew close
Believing the entire house to be his domain,
He considered a carelessly unprotected ankle
anywhere as fair game for attack

There was, in truth, little endearing about him.
"The Cat from Hell" my daughter pronounced
As he rebuffed yet another of her overtures.

He was in indoor cat, and quite mad.

Boe's one redeeming virtue I could see
Was his unqualified devotion to my wife
And the joy his exclusive adoration gave her.
He had arrived with her, a dowry of sorts,
Or an inscrutable prenuptial agreement.

To be fair, the Cat was gentle with our son.
And usually chose to sleep in our room, Still,
I found him generally surly, suspicious and
Ill tempered. "No. He's feisty but he's family"
Insisted my wife, scooping him up in her arms

Saved from a South Boston slum before I arrived,
Boe was as tied to her as remote from the world..
Whenever we took an overnight, we would return
To hairballs or puddles (or sometimes worse)
Expressing his feelings on being abandoned.

The first person up, I always made the coffee.
The Cat from Hell came as I prepared to put
His catfood on his mat—just in time to bite me.
Truth. Predictable, and embarrassing too—
My limbs looked scored by needle tracks!

Once, fretting about something, I awoke early
And had the dish in place before Boe arrived.
Seeing it, he just stared balefully at me, waiting.
I retrieved the food, pretended to fill the plate,
Put it down. He promptly bit me, then ate content.

Boe did have a favorite pasttime in his life:

To crouch motionless by windows staring out
At the birds flittering on feeders and squirrels
Racing across the lawn, his jaws trembling,
Instinctually knowing how nicely they'd crunch.

One day my wife returned to find Boe dead
On the kitchen floor, cause of death unclear.
Called at work, I drove home quickly to find
My wife weeping, my boy confused by his
First encounter with death, and the cat silent.

We wrapped our cat in his blanket, together
With some toys our son wished to give him.
Twenty minutes to a clearing in a wooded grove
Filled with the chatter of birds and squirrels.
I covered the hole I dug with a good-sized stone.

In a few weeks, my little scrapes and punctures
Healed and the scabs fell away. Somehow, though,
Mornings at our house were different now, and less,
In the absence of those sharp teeth and claws,
And that strange, twisted little mind.

Every so often I take a walk to what we call
Boe's Woods to see how our cat is sleeping.

.

Chuck Toll

Lares et Penates: Seal

Seal, our son's stuffed animal,
Lies in the passenger's seat
Awaiting his release from school.

Purchased nearly a decade ago
As a fluffy white newborn pup
In a California Sea World shop,

Seal has long since turned gray
With age and travels. Whiskers
He arrived with have worn away,

But he's kept his eyes and nose,
Though all are scratched and
Have been re-glued several times.

Seal looks on with wise passivity,
Saving his strength for whatever
Lies in store when school is over.

He's an experienced campaigner,
Durable, prepared for anything
And dependable as they come.

Over time, his travels and travails
Have certainly matched those of
His sea-spanning counterparts;

He has camped on Baja beaches,
Grown sodden in Niagra's mists
Explored Grand Canyon trails.

He has traveled coast to coast
In cars, trucks, planes and trains,
Sampling motels and desert sites.

Seal eats with us, sleeps with us,
Hunts evil warriors or space aliens
In the dark corridors of video games.

He has been carried, toted, dragged,
Biked and driven. He's watched movies,
Music lessons and wrestling matches.

Seal has shown awesome durability
In hundreds of washings to remove
Spaghetti sauce and playground dirt.

Two years ago, Seal spent some time
As a Secret Friend, always present
But often hidden and not on display.

.

Then our boy outgrew some doubts
And decided it was okay for peers to
Know he liked spinach, preferred pink,

And, most important, had a special pet.
Love me, love my Seal, he decided.
So Seal re-emerged, forgiving as ever.

Over his years as boon companion
Seal's accomplishments are legion:
Consoler when parents don't understand;

Kindred spirit on tedious adult outings;
Comforter in sickness (emergency hanky) :
Nighttime guardian, back-up pillow;

Empathetic always; understanding ever,
Even when employed as a projectile;
Reliably agreeable, never saying no.

Drier of a decade's worth of tears;
Celebrant of victories large and small;
Silent, eloquent model of good behavior.

If people can display old game balls,
Trophies and photos on mantles as
Memorials to their own past victories,

How much more will Seal deserve
To reside in some prominent place
That honors all he has done and been-

A place where he can gaze down
With scratched but gentle agate eyes
And continue his talismanic role,

Binding past to present and present
To future by his strength and presence.
And, who knows, perhaps some day

The small hand of a child of a child
May stretch upward to Seal to send
The whole cycle round again.

Chuck Toll

Lares et Penates: Thanksgiving Paean

I'd like to propose a toast to Thanksgiving Day:
A plucky little celebration modestly begun
That has kept its modest outlines to this day;
Our nation's only holiday with the gumption
To meet the business world eyeball to eyeball
And make it blink.

Thanksgiving is a lazy, indolent day of sharing
Predictable yet tasty home-cooked dishes together
With equally predictable yet pleasant company,
A day when, if airports and highways are clogged,
At least the travelers share a common destination:
The bosom of their families.

This holiday does not pressure third world children
To toil overtime producing hats or flags or swords,
Or stuffed animals with toxic innards, leaden trim,
And eyes that fall off which, if licked, promptly morph
Into insidious drugs. It is the one time in the year
When we stick to the basics.

Thanksgiving is mainly about being part of a family,
Not gift giving, expansive parties or romantic dinners.
We don't head for warm beaches overhung by palms.
Or go on liquor-sodden junkets to gaming casinos.
No special clothing need be purchased to observe
This homespun holiday.

Thanksgiving is when squabbling siblings may pause
Their mutual torturing, when truculent teens may emerge
From their gloom long enough to speak civilly, if briefly,
To astonished parents, and when the men may retire
To watch football on TV, dishes unwashed, without
Their women feeling abused.

Easter, Memorial Day, the 4th and Labor Day have all
Succumbed to ad campaigns and the national mania
For buying 'stuff.' St. Nick has watched his Christmas
Bloat into a three-month season of its own, marked
By sales, special hours and extra staff who urge us
To spend beyond our means.

Save for an appreciative glance at how a cousin
Now fills her blue jeans, this is an innocent holiday.
More thought should be given, more action taken,
For those whose lives leave little grounds for thanks.
But it feels good to be part of a family with a past;
Our thanks, if shallow, are sincere.

It's true the week does not begin auspiciously.
Children dressed as Indians and Pilgrims are led
From photo-ops in the gym to homeroom feasts

Where doting parents help teachers and principals
To dispense inaccurate history and colonial fare
In plastic plates and Dixie cups.

The week ends even worse as stores start their sales
Before the holiday dishes have even cooled. Instantly,
We find ourselves swept up by a level 5 hurricane that
Buffets the land for weeks.. But in the hurricane's eye
Thanksgiving has lived again, simple joys and warmth
Aglow like a Norman Rockwell painting.

Two days ago I helped some neighborhood boys
Make cranberry sauce. Watching their shared delight
As sugar dissolved and berries burst, I wondered how
Wm Bradford's little celebration in a brave new world
Could be put to better use, helping us to learn and live
A broader sense of 'family.'

Chuck Toll

Love Songs: Sleeping Through the Hurricane

I suppose I could have been more helpful that night,
But it had been a long day and frankly I was tired.
While the wild winds buffeted our darkened house,
While tree boughs groaned in protest and driven rain
Pounded on the roof, I just slept through it all.

We prepared as best we could, battened hatches,
Ate cold supper by candlelight and went upstairs.
Three of us began the night in the large dark bed,
But only one felt duty bound to maintain a vigil
And rose to keep her watch over our little world.

So my boy and I slumbered on, oblivious to all,
While she listened to the violence building outside,
Heard trees trunks shiver, split, come crashing down,
Heard pier pilings sucked from their murky beds,
Heard faint sirens wailing in the distance.

By morning the hurricane had gone its way.
Sunlight dappled the leaf and branch-strewn lawn.
My boy awoke wanting to play so we went outside,
While my wife, who finally left her post at dawn,
Slept fitfully with her storm-tossed dreams.

Chuck Toll

Love Songs: Touchstone

When I falter,
start sinking
into myself,
I reach for
something to
raise me up.

Something
small perhaps,
but buoyant
and strong
as belief
in the sun.

Something
small perhaps,
but forever
color and warmth,
shape and depth,
and yes.

This source
of strength
a simple fact:
my happy
is tied to
your happy.

Chuck Toll

Love Songs: Wish, My Love

Wish, my love,
Upon a star.
Let its power
Bear you far
Beyond the clouds
Of restless dreams
And life where naught
Is as it seems.

For you deserve
The best there is:
The truest love
And sacred bliss.
My hope for you
Is all, not less,
That you could wish
Of happiness.

Chuck Toll

Misc.: Using Clivus® Composting Toilets

Many environmentally conscious folk who live on the low-lying Chesapeake Bay islands have switched to composting toilets manufactured by the Clivus Company. These work well, but it is important to follow instructions for their use carefully..

I'm Clivus, and I've got three rules
For those who'd sit upon my stools.

1. Be sure to keep my seats closed well
Or be prepared for pungent smell.
2. Put nothing down me you suppose
Will not in three years decompose.
3. Above all, tossing anything lit's forbidden
(tho it could keep your smoking hidden) .

If feeling testy, you should say,
Must we silly rules obey?
Tis not so simple as you think.
There's more to fret about than stink.

You're seated on the working end
Of a very large-bore cannon, friend.
With noxious smell comes methane gas
Ready to ignite your sass.

If my last rule you do not follow,
Then faster far than gull or swallow
From Port Isabel to Tangier you'll fly
Without the time to wave good-bye.

Chuck Toll

Misc.: Fable

An old and jealous king his army led
To battle, gaining gold and other booty.
The greatest prize by far, t'was said,
Was a princess of unsurpassed beauty,
And to this maiden the king was wed.

The jealous king fretted constantly
That knights or even common men
Might test his young bride's chastity.
The idea of a belt he soon dismissed,
For what if someone gained the key?
Hide her in a tower away from view?
But men might scale the walls easily.
Ladies in waiting? No, he knew what
Women do with women. A quandary.

Finally the king settled on his warriors,
Not one but twenty of the very finest.
Carefully he placed them in her chambers,
Positioned so each in turn could guard
Not just the queen but also all the others.

But there was a flaw in the royal plan,
For the young queen's heart proved large
As the old and jealous king's was small.
Amid the throng she loosed her gown
And loved them all, you see,
And loved them all.

Chuck Toll

Misc.: Riddle

I gazed down the towpath to where it divided in two
Exactly as the old hag had predicted in my dream.
The diverging forks beckoned me with equal strength,
Sun dappled, overhung with leafy boughs, evenly worn.

But one, the crone had said, led straight to hungry lions
Waiting to gorge on the hearts of hapless travelers.
The other way proceeded to the castle with its riches
And golden princess patiently awaiting her deliverer.

The gnome twins, too, were standing silent by the fork
As the crone had foretold, identical in form and dress.
But one, she'd warned, was wholly good and did not lie,
The other altogether evil, unable to speak the truth.

The witch had told me I might ask one question only.
How to sort truth from falsehood when they looked alike?
Could I rely on either gnome to help me reach the castle?
Which creature to approach, and what question to pose?

Doffing my pack, I took out cheese and crust of bread.
Wineskin in hand, I sat wearily on the grass margin and
Watched the twins so dauntingly similar. I supped and
Drank and thought while the sun began its slow descent.

At length, my luncheon done, I rose and stretched, then
Walked directly to the twin who happened to be nearer.
"If I ask your brother which way the lions lie in wait,
What will he say?" I asked. Silently, he pointed right.

"I thank you, kind sir," I replied, heading right to claim
My reward. My reasoning I leave for you to explain

Chuck Toll

Misc.: Spell Checking

[Extending an earlier version
shared anonymously by email]

Eye halve a gnu spell Czech or,
It came with my pea see.
It plane lee marques four my revue
Miss takes eye dew knot sea.

Eye strike a key and type a word
And weight four it two say
Weather eye am wrong oar write
It shows mi strait a weigh.

As soon as a mist ache is maid
It nose bee fore two long
And eye can putt the era rite
Its rare lea ever wrung.

I've scent this mess sage threw it,
And I'm shore yore pleased too no
Its let her prefect in every weigh;
My cheque err tolled mi sew.

Chuck Toll

Misc.: The Teacher's Prayer (Best Sung)

The Teacher's Prayer

Pearl's Intro:

Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz.
My friends all drive Porches, I must make amends.
Worked hard all my life, no help from my friends.
Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz.

Oh Lord, won't you buy me a color TV.
Dialing for Dollars is trying to find me.
You'll find me at home each day just at three.
Oh Lord, won't you buy me a color TV.

Take it, Teachers:

Oh Lord, won't you give me a little more sleep.
I'm so doggoned tired that I could just weep.
Without enough shut-eye, my top speed's a creep.
Oh Lord won't you give me a little more sleep.

Oh Lord, ask my children to leave home the guns.
A bulge in a jacket now gives me the runs.
The principal promised first grade would be fun.
So Lord, ask my children to leave home the guns.

Oh Lord, please explain what is wrong with my aide
She's late and she grumbles, and makes me afraid.
Is she mad at her paycheck or needs to get laid?
Oh Lord, can you tell me what's wrong with my aide.

Oh Lord, what's that stain on Little Joe's pants?
He just stands there and lets go, like he's in a trance.
I don't want to be here, I'd prefer southern France.
Oh Lord, help me deal with Little Joe's pants.

Oh Lord, why insist on No child Left Behind?
The uniform teaching is stupid and blind.
Now standardized testing puts us all in a bind.
Oh Lord, why insist on No child Left Behind?

Oh Lord, please send us a copier that works.
I thought decent equipment was one of the perks.
It's constantly broken, the staff are such jerks!
Oh Lord, won't you give us a copier that works.

Oh Lord, won't you write out our School Action Plan.
If you'd do the work for me I'll be your best fan.
Could be in Jamaica improving my tan
If I knew you were writing our School Action Plan.

Oh Lord, for five minutes won't you cover me.

Just watch all my children while I take a pee.
Don't think I can hold it til they leave at three,
So Lord, for five minutes won't you cover me.

Oh Lord, give me tenure by the end of this year.
My bills keep on growing, I feel insecure,
With a stable bank balance I could shift into gear.
Oh Lord, give me tenure by the end of this year.

Oh Lord please cancel the parent meeting tonight.
The moms are all witches, the dads are uptight.
My principal will beat me if I don't do it right!
So Lord, please cancel the meeting tonight.

Oh Lord, give your blessing to our little school.
We're small but we're feisty, with teachers so cool.
Give us parking space, raises, and throw in a pool.
Oh Lord, shed your blessings on our little school.

Chuck Toll

Natural: Jimmy's Song

Blue Crabs form the center of Chesapeake Bay marine life. A mature male is called a Jimmy, a fertilized female a Sook, and an as-yet unfertilized female is a Sally. Each is readily identifiable by the underside of its shell, which resembles the Washington Monument, the Capitol or a triangle. Crabs are intense creatures, and so is their mating.

I'm horny and in need of sex
With someone other than my ex.
I spend my time in spurge and grasses
Cruising for some likely lasses.

My Washington Monument's size and shape
Should make you ladies stop and gape.
I'm big, I'm blue, with snappers strong.
I'm just the one for whom you long!

So if you're in your final molt,
Indulge that urge, don't hide or bolt.
The moon and tide and temp are prime,
Let's do the dance while we have time.

Hey, gal, you with Capitol Dome,
You can just stay right at home.
What I want's a hot triangle
To which, as doubler, I can dangle.

So gimme Sally, get back Sookie,
What I'm looking for is nookie!

Chuck Toll

Natural: The Massacre of the Innocents

Our driveway has become
A killing field for worms,
And we don't know what to do.

They wiggle out of the grass
At all times of the day or night
To writhe and wriggle on the concrete.

We pick up the living ones we find,
(My wife and son wincing in disgust)
And return them gently to the green grass.

But they return.
They writhe a bit more,
And then they expire in contorted agony.

In death, they turn quickly into brittle crisps,
Sad husks of their former selves that we sweep up
And resignedly consign to the nearest trashcan.

What impels the worms, like legless lemmings,
To hasten to the tarmac to their destruction?
We have no moles to flee, our lawn is healthy.
The temperature is neither hot nor cold.
It has only rained in moderation.

So what is their problem?
Is it that their asses are where their brains should be,
Or that they literally have their heads up their asses?

Charles Darwin spent forty years off and on
Studying worms. His last book, "The Formation
of Vegetable Mould, Through the Action of Worms,
with Observations of Their Habits, " proved more
successful at the time than "The Origin of Species."

Perhaps Darwin could solve our problem.
But he, like our worms,
Is dead.

* * * * *

My wife brooded
For quite some time in silence
About the multitudes of worms

Who seemed determined
Rain or shine to use our driveway
As the site of their self-immolation

Despite our best efforts to relocate them
Where they might push on more successfully

With their wormy lives for the betterment of all.

Then, practical as ever,
She solved the problem.

She dug out an old, five-gallon flower pot,
Filled it two-thirds full of potting soil left over
From some now long-forgotten summer project,
Added just a little water and a small sign:

 Welcome to
 Wormie's Retreat
 Special Off-Season Rates
 Vacancies!

This sign, featuring a beguiling hand-drawn worm
With bulbous eyes, raised eyebrows, and a wide smile
(So much for anatomically correctness) ,
She taped to an old chopstick
And stuck in the center
Of the pot.

"Okay, Holden Caufield, " she slapped
An old pooper-scooper in my hand,
"They're your problem now.
But no one comes in the house
Until they're housebroken."

Chuck Toll

Natural: Why

My little daughter looks up at the new moon
And says, Look, Cookie Moon! And she's right,
Someone has taken a great big bite!

Then she asks me why the sky is blue.
So I explain the molecules comprising air
And how they refract the light waves there.

So, darling, do you understand? I fondly ask.
No, she says, but don't tell me again, let me rest.
Then adds, I think it's 'cause I like blue the best.

Chuck Toll

PH: Hello, PoemHunter Staff, Anyone Home? ? ?

I really want to know whether you exist or not!
Your site has several "Contact Us" links, and
Emails to you produce an "Auto-Thank You"
But our messages then get lost in cyberspace
Or yield "Failed Delivery" notices by the slew.

In "Chariot of the Gods" Erich von Danekin
Postulated aliens who briefly visited Earth,
Prompting pyramids from Mexico to Timbuktu,
But then abandoned us to our own devices.
Can Poemhunter.com be on autopilot too?

In "The Great Gatsby, " Scott Fitzgerald wrote
Symbolically about the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckelburg
Brooding on a sign over a vast Valley of Ashes
Long after he himself had departed in disgust
With his befouled creation. Are you mad at us?

Janice Joplin sang hopefully that she would wait
At home each day just at three for the folks from
Dialing for Dollars. So, too, with this humble poem
I await your return to your loyal PoemHunter fans.
We need your help, guys, so please don't roam!

To anyone else who happens to read this plea,
Be aware that someone called "Sandrine Nzi"
Has begun to send us bogus business scams
She must assume that we're a bunch of jerks;
But what the heck, the site is free and works!

Footnote:

Since joining three months ago, I've never been able to reach
whoever manages the site using 'Contact Us.' If any of you
have e-chatted with Poemhunter staff, or received a response
to a query in recent months, please let me know your secret!
The final stanza, by the way, is also true, and you can confirm
Sandrine Nzi's scams on the Internet (if you want to bother) .

Chuck Toll

PH: MEMBER CONTEST (Who? You! !)

PoemHunter's site and services
I'm sure we all appreciate,
The chance to share and chat for free
Is nothing short of great!

But most of us at times, I think,
Have also felt despond
At PH staff's indifference and
Refusal to respond.

Their surveys often query how
We feel about their site;
But query them thru "Contact Us"-
You just get silence. That's not right!

So what if we're not Willy S-
Our work should be respected!
The staff should winkle out the kinks,
Not leave us so neglected.

So I propose we launch forthwith
A PH CONTEST OF THE SEASON
Just to let off steam and have some fun,
Not any deeper reason.

WRITE A POEM ABOUT POEMHUNTER,
THE THEME AND TONE YOU CHOOSE.
SEASON WITH RHYME OR METER, OR NOT
BE GUIDED BY YOUR MUSE.

OLD HANDS AND RANK BEGINNERS,
HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO VENT AND RAIL.
BUT IF YOU'VE HAD NO SITE PROBLEMS,
FEEL FREE TO LAUGH AT THOSE WHO WAIL.

JUST POST YOUR ENTRIES AS USUAL
ON PH'S SITE THROUGH 25 DECEMBER.
AND COPY "FORUMS: POETRY CONTESTS"
TO GIVE US SOMETHING TO REMEMBER!

PLEASE BEGIN YOUR TITLE WITH "PH: "
AS IN, "PH: A BILLET DEUX FOR YOU."
AS USUAL, REFRAIN FROM NASTY WORDS
SO TITLES LIKE, "PH: YOU WANKERS! " WON'T DO.

As I said, this Modest Proposal is not designed
to raise old grudges or foment insurrection.
But our poetry might gently nudge the PH Staff
To think about correction.

1. If you have an earlier poem about PoemHunter you would like

- members to see again share again, feel free to resubmit.
2. Multiple submissions are welcome.
 3. No Prizes. Just Sharing With Each Other.
 4. Happy Holidays And Have Fun!

Chuck Toll

Places of the Heart: Haiku of the Canyons

Grand Canyon

Touching the gray stone
Formed beneath an inland sea
Before life on land.

* * *

Grand Gulch

High on canyon walls
Bleached silent by constant sun
The sheep and snakes dance.

* * *

Bullet Canyon

Hidden, old yet whole,
A kiva with sipapu
Summoning spirits.

* * *

Aruvaipa Canyon

Rustling fronds obscure
The scraping of the wren.
Canyon morning breeze.

* * *

Betatakin Canyon

So narrow at points
You can touch both walls,
Or suddenly drown.

* * *

Chevalon Canyon

Two ravens riding
Updrafts from the heated walls,
Wheeling in silence.

* * *

No Name Canyon, Hovenweep

Water from a seep
Drips down moss to a hole cut

The shape of a gourd.

* * *

Chaco Canyon

Trails spider outwards,
Webs to trade and to rule
Others less warlike.

* * *

Eaton Canyon

From the tamarisks
Beneath the rim homes and pools
A bear's eyes watch us.

* * *

Glen Canyon

Lake sediment clings
To rocks waiting to be cleansed
Slowly by the rains.

* * *

Canyon of the Yellowstone

The waterfalls' crash
Deafens RVs and tourists,
And Clark and Lewis.

* * *

Canyon de Chelly

Pickups in streambeds
Below the empty ruins
For exorbitant fees

* * *

Zion Canyon (Backside)

Meeting the cold stare
Of two men in worn denim
While crossing the ford.

* * *

Smith Rock Canyon

The deadened echoes
Of climbers feeling their way
Watched by an eagle.

Chuck Toll

Places of the Heart: Porches

When out of sorts with life or self,
A porch is hard to beat
As long as you've a comfy chair
And space to stretch your feet.

Lean back and watch the world go by,
Forego life's stress and chatter.
What's not been done remains undone.
But, really, did it matter?

Unlike the confines of a house
That holds the world at bay,
A porch connects to life itself
At any time of day.

A porch's vantage point and height,
The time of day or year,
Is less important than the chance
It gives to see and hear.

A portal to life beyond yourself
Is what a porch provides.
It helps regain perspective
And quite a bit besides.

Empty your mind as you'd turn out
Your pocket change at night.
Just watch and listen silently,
In small things take delight:

Morning dew and waking sounds
Then sunlight through the leaves,
Small children passing on their bikes,
And smells borne by the breeze,

Birds in search of food or mates,
Your neighbors mowing lawns
The setting sun and rising moon,
At twilight deer with fawns.

A porch restores one's sense of place,
Shows how all fits together,
Revealing ties that ease the heart
In any kind of weather.

Chuck Toll

Places of the Heart: Seen First from Seaward

Tangiers forms part of an archipelago of small islands situated in the broad lower reaches of America's Chesapeake Bay. Established in colonial times, it remains a community of watermen whose primary occupations are crabbing and oyster dredging. Most families have lived there for generations, speaking a dialect laced with remnants of English unheard since Elizabethan times.

Seen first from seaward, Tangier Island
Looms small and low, and lacking highland.
Its shores are mostly bayside marsh,
Where wading birds cry loud and harsh.

No malls or theatres greet your view.
Of roads and houses, just a few.
To cross the island, take bike or cart,
Your trip will end before you start.

The watermen and their families here
Live lives that most of us would fear.
Away by dawn as they've been taught,
To trawl a world that time forgot.

And as they work in cold or squall
They pose a question for us all.
What's needed in a life well lived-
For what we gain, what do we give?

To find the Island's heart and soul,
If that should be your visit's goal,
You need to grasp their sense of place,
Of being of a separate race.

A weathered folk at one with God,
They walk the lanes their fathers trod.
Here past and present side by side
Are joined by water, wind and tide.

When work is done, despite the weather,
You'll tend to find them close together.
The school, the general store, the church,
Those are places you should search.

That's where they meet to chew the fat
And ruminate on this or that,
Retelling favorite tales and jokes
As they use caulk to seal their boats.

Speak names from stones seen through a fence
Or in the church yard-Crockett, Spence,
McCready, Pruitt, Parks and Dize-
Around you most will raise their eyes.

In the modern world of plane and phone,

Where neighbors can remain unknown,
Our costs are high, Tangiers' much cheaper.
We travel farther, they live deeper.

Chuck Toll

Portrait Gallery: Creative License

One April Claude Monet became enraptured
With an oak, a vision begging to be captured
On canvas, bare limbs stark against the light.
Magnifique! Mon Dieu, he'd paint this right!

His brushes trimmed and paint on palette, Monet
With impressionistic fervor daubed his way
Toward greatness. Alas, it soon began to pour.
Zut! Gathering up his gear, he went indoors.

La pluie continued not one week but three.
In May Monet emerged to find his tree
Now hidden under leaves of verdant green.
Merde! he yelled, stomping his feet with spleen.

Not one to beat about the bush (or tree) ,
Monet demanded that the mayor of Giverny
At once dispatch a crew to strip each and every leaf.
Later he returned to paint a tree now wrapped in grief.

Chuck Toll

Portrait Gallery: D'Ailleurs C'est Toujours Les Autres Qui Meurent

1913 N.Y. Armory Art Show visitors were dismayed,
By what Frenchman Marcel Duchamp displayed.
His painting 'Nude Descending a Staircase (No.2) '
Left women flushing pinkly, strong men too.
Its casual fusion of cubism, sex and motion
Dismissed every cherished Victorian notion
Of taste, decorum, womanhood and social class.
It implied, too, that representative art is crass.

So 'Nude Descending, ' while bold and striking,
Proved not, alas, to many people's liking.
"This is not art! " Teddy Roosevelt (retired)
Boomed, and critic Julian Street was inspired
To call it "An explosion in a shingle factory, "
Offending sense, both common and olfactory.
Others said the painting should not be viewed
Because it was so crude and...er...nude.

In fact, Duchamp had already put away his paints
And was exploring a new sculpture: "ready-mades, "
Objects pleasing to the senses whose invention
Asked little human intervention. At a convention
for avant-garde artists, he unveiled his 'Fountain '
Which, they found, was a urinal of white porcelain.
The reaction of these "modernists" was stunning:
"An insult! " "Abomination! " "Immoral plumbing! "

Duchamp enjoyed the snapping of these vultures
Though he'd stopped making tactile sculptures.
He preferred instead to refine his game of chess,
And that he did-for four decades more or less.
Just one last time he set the world of art awirl,
Photographed in his 70s at chess with a naked girl
Named Eve (whose coquettish confidence abated
When she found herself fools-mated) .

On his deathbed, the artist who for half a lifetime vied
With art's clichés and tired rules, looked around and sighed,
"Up to now, it has always been the others who died."

Chuck Toll

Portrait Gallery: Disingenuous

For Edward Hopper to claim he only sought
To catch the light at different times of day
Is like Mark Twain in his Huck Finn to say
That readers seeking a moral would be shot.

Chuck Toll

Portrait Gallery: Fauve Pas

In 1961, art lovers in
New York were all aglow:
Their own Museum of Modern Art
Had bought and planned to show
Henri Matisse's masterpiece
Entitled Le Bateau.

This painting overnight became
The talk of all the town.
Forty-seven days of raves,
Then someone with a frown
Looked closer and saw that it
Was hanging upside down.

Chuck Toll

Portrait Gallery: Madam X

How much do artists know, truly and deeply know?
Sometimes more than they think, sometimes less,
Sometimes both more and less at the same time.

Take John Singer Sargent, for example, at 28
Comfortably ensconced in Parisienne society
With enough commissions to make VanGogh cry.

Young but talented, already a consummate painter
And recognized as such, which really matters!
His portraits, they're honest even as they flatter.

Sargent is a master of brushstroke, graceful lines,
And striking arrangements. He's one whose work
Dominates a wall rather than merely decorates it.

He spies a beauty, a darling of Parisian society,
Mme. Virginie Pierre Gautrau, American by birth,
But Creole and monied, plus her French is perfect.

He must paint her! The introductions are made.
He pleads, she agrees. Even before he begins
He knows this painting will be a true masterpiece!

Sargent doesn't rush things: he plans; he sketches;
He tries various poses and outfits (she loves that part) :
He defers to her social engagements, which are legion.

As days stretch into weeks, and weeks into months,
Mme grows bored with the project. For his part, Sargent
Remains excited about the project but bored with her.

Now she stands in a subtle curve, one hand on a table.
Face in profile, alabaster skin set off by sleek black dress
And dark background, the jeweled straps of her gown glow.

Both artist and subject are pleased with the finished work.
Arrangements are made to enter it in this year's salon
Where in years past his entries have been well received.

* * * * *

The execution begins moments after the Salon doors open.
People stand silent before the painting 'Portrait of Mme****'
The critics, hearing the thunderous silence, press closer.

What do they see? A violation of taste, of decency, of ...
Everything! Carnality personified in all its suggestive
And forbidden allure—and in one of their own!

They see a siren buxom yet so narrow at the waist,
The twist of her body suggesting how it might writhe

Under other circumstances, the velveteen black dress

So palpable against the chalky skin, turning the mind
To what it hides, why, it could have been added later
As an afterthought, and look at the right hand strap

Fallen off her shoulder, perhaps she had just come
From writhing, perhaps the other strap will likewise fall
and she will be writhing shortly, and to top it all

A head in feral profile, sharp little teeth hidden,
Without expression or thought, both unnecessary,
And, see, the dresstop shapes a heart over the breasts!

Praxiliteles would praise the 'S' curve of the body,
But its effect here is far from elegant or classical.
It is lewd and prurient—and in one of our own!

* * * * *

Mystified by the silent mutters and furtive stares, Sargent
Still knows he has not reached his audience as he planned,
Or perhaps he has connected in ways they cannot discuss.

Horrified, he withdraws the painting from the showing
And, back in his studio, stares at his disgraced work,
Then repaints the shoulder strap back in its proper place.

He retitles, too: 'Portrait of Mme X', less like a secret
And more like a model. Then he reads the first reviews.
'Portrait of Mme X, ' strap in place, does not return to the Salon.

So the Parisian art scene in furor turns on a favored son.
The girl, seeing the work in a different light, is in hysterics.
The family wants to buy the painting to destroy it.

Soon there is talk of multiple lawsuits as well.
So sargent departs Paris immediately and silently,
Carrying his seven foot Madam X with him,

He settles in London where, well known in social circles,
He is quickly embraced and shortly back in business
Painting portraits of individuals and families that matter.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century and for nearly
Two decades into the twentieth, there was no artist more
Popular or prosperous than John Singer Sargent.

He kept Madam X until he was a old man, finally selling
It to New York's Museum of Art. He wrote that it was
Probably the best work he ever did. But what did he know?

Chuck Toll

Portrait Gallery: Pase Picasso

The midwife of Pablo Picasso
With awareness akin to Sargasso
Thought him dead on arrival,
Not a chance of revival,
and departed the sorry fiasco.

An uncle who'd trained as physician
Saw no need to employ a mortician.
Thrusting cigar aside,
He approached the boy's side,
Puffed a few times and-viola! -ignition.

Pablo knew from his first infant sneeze
Life was good but without guarantees,
So he was from the start
Most prolific in art,
And also in wives and amies.

Chuck Toll

Portrait Gallery: The Gentle Art of Making Enemies

I have seen, and heard, much of cockney impudence before now;
but I never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas
for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face.

-John Ruskin

James McNeill Whistler, American ex-pat
Artist living in London, was a child of destiny.
He knew it and, worse, he showed it.

Arrogant, condescending, always ready
With an unpleasant word for anyone.
Contemptuous of most fellow artists,
Disagreeable with merchants and bankers,
Difficult with dealers who showed his work,
Haughty with those who would buy his work,
Disdainful with critics who help set tastes.
In short, a nasty piece of work.

Yet Whistler was also steering his art out
beyond the known and travelled sea lanes.
Narrative, didactic, representational buoys
Bobbed and clanged unheeded in his wake.
As he drove hard to the wind toward realms
Where once cartographers had written,
'Here There be Dragons! '

Caught up In the excitement of the chase,
Whistler was not deterred by fog horns of alarm.
Each painting another league into the mystery
Of the uncharted seas where paint, not subject,
Was what mattered, where point and purpose
Were relieved of duty by the shapes and colors
And textures of a new aesthetic.

Eventually, the venerable critic John Ruskin
Had some quite unpleasant things to say about
The artist and his 'Fireworks: Study in Black and Red.'
And James McNeill Whistler, combative as always,
Sued for libel and damages.

At the trial, Whistler explained at great length
(And slowly, to help the 'jury of his peers' understand)
How his creative vision had been grossly maligned
By Ruskin's intemperate pen, He explained as well
Why he had decided to call his portrait of his mother
'Arrangement in Grays and Black, ' and, by inference,
Why the jury's own understanding or art was outdated,
Ignorant and wrong.

Later, Ruskin's counsel stood and asked: "The labor

of two days' work. Is that for which you are asking two hundred guineas? " "No, " replied Whistler grandly. "I ask it for the knowledge I have gained in the work Of a lifetime."

The jury agree that Ruskins' words had damaged
And found for the plaintiff. To add their own critique
Of what they had learned from the painter (Blimey,
Would your mum like being called 'an arrangement'!) ,
They awarded James McNeill Whistler damages
in the amount of one farthing.

Whistler went bankrupt with his legal expenses.

(Note: The title is from an article Whistler wrote after the trial that still reflected only modest understanding of the issues at play.)

Chuck Toll

Prose Poem: First Date

Welcome to EarnYourDegree.com
Offering information about online colleges and classes.
Enhance your career and earning power with a college degree!

A live agent is here to assist you with any questions you might have about online universities.

Kelly Says: Hi, thanks for chatting with me. My name is Kelly and I am a chat representative with BestInternetSchools.com here to answer any questions you may have.

Kelly says: Whenever you are ready, just type 'HI' or 'HELLO' in the space below to let me know you are there, and we can get started...

Kelly Says: Simply choose a degree from our list to find what field you would like to advance in! [CLICK HERE](#) to get started.

Kelly Says: Hey wait! We hate to see you leave! It only takes a minute to fill out our simple form, and you'll receive information about degree programs designed to meet your needs as a working adult. [CLICK HERE](#) to return.

Kelly Says: Okay, I'll be moving on now... Last chance... Just type 'HI.'

You: Hi-I'm interested in opportunities for TEACHING online. I don't want to take courses; I want to OFFER them. Can you help me?

Kelly Says: Remember if you looking to advance your education and jump-start your career then let us give you FREE college information! [CLICK HERE](#) to return.

You: That's not what I'm asking for. Do you know any email addresses or phone numbers I could use to explore opportunities to teach for the colleges you are representing? The phone numbers posted on their sites just lead to prerecorded messages.

Kelly Says: Earn your degree while you work. Distance learning is tailor made for busy working adults. You can now study on your own time, at your own pace, and out of the convenience of your own home.

You: Are you just an automated response? Who won the World Series?

Kelly Says: I'm a live virtual agent.

You: What does virtual mean in this case?

Kelly Says: Virtual is a computer simulation of a real chat :)

You: So I can't ask you for a date? Gee whiz!

Kelly Says: No this is not a scam. We have helped out many people in the past, let us help you out!

You: I wasn't trying to insult you. Don't be so prickly!

Kelly Says: With technology and current events constantly changing, college textbooks become quickly outdated. Online education has the advantage-it's constantly on the cutting edge. For students and teachers alike, the Internet is their resource.

You: I don't think you'd be much fun anyway.

Kelly Says: Discover the best way to pay for your online education. Our search service will find the schools that fit your needs.

You: Don't you ever think about anything beside work? I worry for you, gal.

Kelly Says: Understandable, but please don't hesitate, this is a limited time discount that I am authorized to offer you right now through this chat. [CLICK HERE](#) because this offer may not be available tomorrow.

You: Don't discount yourself, Kelly! There's a whole world out here waiting to be savored! Stand up for your rights! Break out and smell the flowers! Let me help you!

Kelly Says: This whole process is quick and easy to get going, so why not start right now?

You: I agree. Just stand up, turn off the computer, and head for the door. I'll be across the street parked in an old Impala ragtop. We're going cruising!

Kelly Says: Can I provide you with a link back to BestInternetSchools.com?

You: Nah, I'm a one-girl guy. See you outside

Chuck Toll

Prose Poem: The Feng Shui of Squirrels

"There are too many squirrels!" my wife exclaimed. "They've taken over. They not only eat all the birdseed I put out, they eat the bird feeders themselves. They're gnawing their way into the birdhouses too. Do you think they'll start in on the house?"

I looked through the kitchen window above the sink. She was right. On the lawn before my eyes, more than a dozen squirrels gamboled on the sun-dappled grass, dug relentlessly in an area I was trying to reseed that spring, chased each other through the branches, and swung acrobatically from the feeders they were plundering. Goldfinches, titmice, sparrows, chickadees and a few warblers perched uncertainly in the branches above. Only the mourning doves, whose gentle tones and appearance belie an unexpectedly resolute nature, seemed willing to challenge the squirrels in the search for food.

"They're lemmings determined to push others into the sea for a change," my wife fumed. "Can't you do something?"

So that afternoon I drove into town and purchased an environmentally sanctioned Havahart cage trap and a big bag of peanuts. Squirrel Season was about to begin.

The first day I bagged two, the following day four, then another three, two the next, then four again. Each angry, sputtering squirrel I drove more than a mile away to a secret spot I had determined to be well hidden from curious windows of neighboring houses. It was a woody place that promised good habitat for small furry critters, and there I let my captives go.

But our squirrel population remained the same.

I borrowed a second Havahart trap from the friend of a friend. When both traps were filled, I would cart them away. It soon became a daily ritual: deport two little beggars as the day began, and another two after work. Four a day, regular as clockwork, yet the number of squirrels in the yard remained unchanged.

As the days passed, other creatures occasionally wound up in the traps: several blue jays and an extremely annoyed crow that continued to complain loudly of its mistreatment from a nearby branch long after I had freed it. A young vixen fox taken twice within a week seemed more embarrassed about having been found settling for peanuts rather than pursuing more adventuresome food. Once a skunk blundered in, and my ingenuity was seriously challenged in coming up with a way of letting it go without it letting go.

A downy woodpecker figured how to steal the bait without releasing the door trigger. So did several small ground squirrels, which look just like chipmunks without the head stripe and proved little enough to squeeze through the sides of the iron mesh cage if they sprung the door trigger despite their generally light-footed ways. Occasionally I'd find a sprung but empty trap, but not too often.

As some squirrels grew more cautious around the traps, I became more expert at trapping them. I learned how to place the peanut bait in the most alluring way, varied my bait with crackers and peanut butter, discovered new wiles and gambits to lure them in.

So my daily bag remained quite constant.

Yet by the time my total reached fifty, the number on the lawn had actually seemed to swell. How could this be?

Inevitably, my newfound pastime brought greater knowledge of my quarry. I found that they were uniform only in their depredations; otherwise, they came in several different species and a variety of sizes, colors and dispositions. Most were brown, gray and ocher but a few were black. One sported an impressive palomino coat and enormously bushy tail, while another with an unhealthy albino hue had a scrawny tail more like a rat. They arrived from leafy nests high in the trees, from the brush and saplings beyond the lawn, from birdhouses they had appropriated, from the woodpile, and lord knows where else.

In pursuit of their daily activities, they squeaked, growled, chattered, ground their teeth, whined, or even bleated and gasped like my aunt. Some were playful while others were more dour. There were alpha-squirrels and those who always seemed the butt of others' harassment. In adverse circumstances—like finding themselves on the wrong side of a cage door that had just slammed down) -some were feisty and aggressive, some hysterical, or timid and easily cowed by circumstances beyond their control. One just uttered little peeps of dismay, clutching her bosom over her quaking heart, fearing the path to freedom when offered and complicating matters by escaping into the car itself and hiding under a seat. It took ten minutes and an old broom to get her out.

Whatever kinds of squirrels I carted away—large or small, brown or gray, testy or timid—there always seemed more of the same waiting to flaunt themselves the next day.

My father-in-law, greatly amused by my faltering relocation program, sent me a cartoon depicting columns of squirrels all converging on our house. From then on, every time I encountered one on the road, I fretted about its destination. My nature-loving vegetarian daughter conjured visions of babies abandoned in their nests and begged me to stop. When she shared her concerns with my mother, I began receiving worried phone calls from her as well. My little boy laughed and said I looked funny always carrying squirrels around in boxes. In a flat, rather expressionless voice, my wife informed me that when his school class shared stories about what their did for a living, our son said I was a squirrel collector.

Even my wife, she who had been the original impetus behind my struggle to adjust the balance of nature in our yard, seemed to grow less enthusiastic about my squirrel removal project. She grew silent and withdrawn, and I found that she had dusted off her old Beatrix Potter books and begun rereading *Squirrel Nutkin* to herself, muttering as she read.

Clearly, this test of wills with the squirrels was no longer a laughing matter. My efforts had proved ineffectual, and my standing in the household was suffering.

The number of deportees passed sixty, then seventy and eighty, and still the number of squirrels seemed unabated. Recalling Lady Macbeth's confident assurance to her husband that he would prevail if only he screwed his courage to the sticking point, I considered ratcheting the struggle up to a more bloodthirsty level. I began wondering about recipes in cookbooks on authentic colonial fare. What were the original ingredients in Brunswick Stew, anyway?

The 1975 edition of Joy Of Cooking included excitingly graphic drawings of how to skin a squirrel. I was disheartened to find, however, that neither there nor in the 75th anniversary edition that we had recently purchased did author Irma Rombauer or her daughter Marion Rombauer Becker offer much beyond a general observation that most chicken recipes could also be used successfully for squirrel, and a recipe for walnut sauce.

As I shifted my gaze from my increasingly estranged spouse, remote in her easy chair with her Potter book, to the pest-infested lawn beyond the window, Lady M's fiery words did little to bolster my drooping spirits.

An Internet search yielded a terse acknowledgment by two naturalists of the Wildlife Damage Management System that "squirrels could become a nuisance when their feeding and nesting habits conflict with human interests." Although squirrel numbers could be reduced by predation, shooting, poisoning and trapping, the results were often short-lived, they noted, and were unlikely to affect squirrel populations in the long term in areas with good food and cover. They did not speculate on the nature and scope of the replenishing process.

The fact is that I seemed to have created a squirrel black hole, a vortex that sucked in squirrels from adjacent neighborhoods, then surrounding communities and undeveloped areas, and then from more remote lands beyond the horizon. As the days passed and I began returning home at lunchtime to keep transportation equal to demand, I could only wonder how far the effects of this vacuum were extending.

Sometime after I had carted away my hundredth protesting rodent, I read of a teenage boy on a distant reservation in Minnesota who shot fellow classmates and school staff. He left no note explaining his spasm of profound and inarticulate grief and rage. Had his equilibrium been overturned by a sharp fluctuation in the squirrel population in his area?

And what about the newly burgeoning nuclear programs The North Koreans and Iranians and their nuclear bombs? What about the return of the Afghan Taliban and the unexpected growth in the numbers and violence of fanatics in Iraq. What of the spike in global warming? Or had I unwittingly stumbled upon an exception to the Second Law of Thermodynamics that tossed entropy on its head and might lead to consequences disastrous beyond imagining? Recalling earlier experiments to develop military applications for dolphin and bats, I wondered whether reckless politicians and misguided scientists, either American or part of the Axis of Evil, could fashion a Star Wars system based on squirrels.

Perhaps I had blundered into a hitherto unknown parallel universe. Had I begun siphoning its squirrels into our own universe in utter ignorance of the potential outcomes of this unprecedented transfer of mass and energy?

Shaken by these visions of the possible far-flung consequences of my battle with the squirrels, of the potential disequilibrium and madness rippling outward from my own ground-zero back lawn, I began to doubt the project I had begun so cavalierly months ago. As Kenny Rogers sang, "You have to know when to hold `em, know when to fold `em." There comes a time, I realized, when even resolute promises must be rethought.

Then the friend of a friend wanted his trap back, and then somewhere around one hundred and thirty I lost count. And eventually, of course, I stopped.

A year later, our bags of birdseed still do not last. Our lawn continues to resemble an exhausted playing field worn thin from hotly contested rugby games. We continue to spend exorbitant amounts on feed, feeders, birdhouses-and now professional lawn care as well. We try not to think about the squirrels too much.

But I remember to take my wife out to the movies. And there in the dark with only the flickering light of the screen, we hold hands, reconciled in the wisdom of my decision to bow to the inevitable in the interests of domestic harmony and world peace.

Chuck Toll

Prose Poem: To Touch Again

My father died of cancer more than twenty years ago. A tall and powerful man throughout his life, his change from strong to weak, from clear to vague, took a year.

We watched the whole slow decline. The end came as no surprise, yet still it came too soon. He was ready, his son was not.

My father was a lawyer busy in his grown-up world, spending long days at work and sometimes Saturdays as well. He came home ready for a drink and the evening news. Playing catch on the lawn, helping with homework, listening to childish prattle-such things fell in my mother's realm. But I recall the amazing warmth in his eyes, the sense of safety in his size, the comfort in his hearty laugh. The simple fact was, I adored him.

My father let me help make breakfast on the weekends: orange juice, eggs, sausage, grits and English muffins-most likely the extent of his culinary expertise. Often the cat would perch on his shoulder as he cooked the sausage and I stirred the grits.

Saturday or Sunday night we'd sit together on the sofa in front of the TV, rooting for old Y.A. Tittle and his Giants to beat Vince Lombardi's tough Green Bay team, or cheering on the aging prizefighter, Archie Moore, known as the "Golden Mongoose." (Years later, I'd win a game of Trivial Pursuit remembering that nickname.)

At times, my father strained in unconscious mimicry of the athletes on the screen before us. An exceptional athlete when he was young, feats of athleticism and determined persistence bordered on the spiritual for him. He grouched how Howard Cosell and Jim McKay were incapable of feeling what they reported.

Sitting on the sofa, we held our breath as Franz Klamer in the '76 Winter Olympics hurled himself down the mountain in the downhill, courting disaster at every turn. A splendid, staggering win-my father was so moved he couldn't trust himself to speak for several minutes. The child beside him wondered vaguely and inconclusively whether anything he might ever do could possibly elicit that response.

Through the years, the boy waited for the time when his father would see more closely the son who sat patiently beside him on the sofa. But patience eventually thickened and congealed. The boy waited so long he forgot he was waiting. Adulthood crept up on him slowly, and then things were easier in their way.

Then my father sickened, spent a year increasingly isolated in his grief and pain from a wife who loved him and a son now fully grown who remembered again that he was still waiting, and died. It was not an easy death, for him or those who loved him.

My mother and I together planned the memorial service. My father had not been a religious man, so we agreed that I would preside. We built in time for those who wished to share favorite anecdotes and memories. We made arrangements, too, for playing his favorite piece of music, Pachelbel's Canon in D, which had always moved him deeply.

Attendance at the funeral showed the many lives my father had touched. Colleagues, adversaries, former clients, newer clients, neighbors friends, college and grad school classmates-all came to bid farewell to someone they had loved and treasured. The tributes were many, vivid and funny. For all, it seemed, sadness of loss was tempered

by cherished personal memories of happy moments shared.

The organist who played Pachelbel's Canon did a truly awful job. I was grateful, though, for she helped me focus on her woeful lack of skill rather than sink beneath a flood of desperate feelings. Unwittingly, she gave me a kind of strength just when I needed it.

Then the service was over.

Time passed, as it must. I lived and he did not. I stumbled into love when I was not looking for it and remarried. My new wife and I had a son, beautiful and golden from birth, and we shared his feeding and changing from the start. Later came teaching him to read, ride a bike, grasp what numbers mean. I did my best to explain why the sky is blue and why we can't fly like the birds.

We shared cooking duties and sometimes tackled canning projects like marmalade, piccalilli, and cranberry sauce. Life was good, and my father's death receded like an old wound scarred over.

Nowadays I help chauffeur my son to practices and lessons, and we still share a fair bit of the cooking. At his insistence I watch his growing skill in computer games. Our talk ranges now from how to solve for X to how bad people can get elected. It's getting ugly out there in the world, but inside our family things are calm and happy.

Then recently my wife mentioned that Pachelbel's Canon in D was now our son's favorite music. In fact, he'd said he wanted to learn to play it on his guitar. To help, she'd just bought a disc of various versions of the Canon ranging from strands of violins or flutes to others more elaborate and orchestral. One version, she said, had a female vocalist.

Having heard the music already, my wife left my son and me to listen to the disc together. Sitting on the sofa, we listened quietly to one version after another. Then the woman began to sing:

"How.... where.... when.... will we touch again? " over and over 'How where.... when.... will we touch again? " deeper and deeper "How.... where.... when.... will we touch again? " her words to the music plaintive yet soothing.

When her song ended, my son, gravely quiet, re-cued the disc and played her a second time.

"How.... where.... when.... will we touch again? " My boy looked up at me and smiled, his young face relaxed and happy, wreathed in afternoon sunlight slanting through a window. He reached out and lay his hand casually on my arm, stroking up and down, his look warm and familiar as a long forgotten dream. So we sat there on the sofa as Pachelbel enfolded three of us in his music.

Chuck Toll

The Art in Art: Advice on Life

I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed!
Bewailed the anguished poet.

Then be less clumbsey, said the weed.
I'm sharp, and well you know it.

Chuck Toll

The Art in Art: Herron's Question

A not-so-good friend of Stephen Daedalus
Once read a distracting query from the shelf.
He admired the question's fine scholastic stink
But was too lazy to try to answer it himself:

'If a man in a rage hacks at a piece of wood
And in the process fashions the likeness of a cow,
Is that representation a work of art?
Pray tell us whether, why and how.'

This question, given the consideration it deserves,
Unfolds like the layers of an onion insidiously,
Forcing us to reconsider of our most basic beliefs.
Daedalus did not take up the challenge, but will thee?

Chuck Toll

The Art in Art: On writing Poetry

Robert Frost once observed in a moment of pet,
That tennis is foolish when played without net.
So a poet abandoning rhythmical verse
Was to him just a lightweight (or something far worse) .

As I see it, the goal's not to best an opponent
But determine a theme, then refine, shape and hone it.
Using rhythm and rhyme adds a memorable sound.
(Who truly recalls much of Elliot or Pound?)

If you would write your verse in classic rhyme,
You'll probably use the iamb all the time.
Iambic feet in groups of five are stately
Yet lithe, as used by Shakespeare cherished greatly.

Trochees, though, have lots of power;
Use them when you snarl or glower.
Shorter lines, three feet or four,
Let you grasp your subject's core.

The bounce of the anapest many find funny
As it scampers along like the legs on a bunny.
Yet its lilt appears often as part of our speech
So it can bring subjects within the heart's reach.

Dactyls instead are insistent and driving,
Forceful and rolling with purposeful striving.
Horses and trains, also feelings in motion
Show a dactylic rhythm if you've got the notion

When you need change in the rhythm, it's neat
To add strong spondees or weak pyrhic feet.
Slow down, look closely, or speed things up,
Add that dash of 'different' to your cup.

If you feel quite at ease with conventional forms,
That's great. But if not, bid adieu to the norms.
Beyond the predictable, seek new realms of choice;
That's where you must search to discover your voice.

Intense and insistent, poems are different from prose.
(Poetry, it's said, never feels like prose to those who knows.)
For we treasure each line that rings true like a bell,
Spoken from the heart to our hearts wondrously well.

Chuck Toll

The War: A Native Son

Our small New England town buried a son yesterday,
A young soldier killed on duty in Afghanistan.
It was our first casualty in struggles far away
But, as it had proved, not sufficiently removed.

At the church service, his brother recalled
How he was tough, but with children gentle
As a butterfly. 'Now I won't worry any more, '
His mother wept. 'He is safe now.'

The funeral procession made its somber way
Under skies gunmetal gray and threatening rain.
Hand-drawn tributes to "our hero" lined the route,
And small flags provided by the VFW.

The young soldier was buried with military honors
In the town cemetery, the governor present,
And a presidential hopeful not unmindful of
Where the nation's first primary is held.

The paper gave its native son front-page coverage
Complete with photos of his young, round face,
Smiling beneath his helmet, a cheerful tourist
In a strange and sandy land.

The story recalled the young man's skill at sports,
And mentioned high school records still left standing.
He enlisted out of school, it said, and saw duty
In South Korea, Iraq and Afghanistan.

In his last posting, he led a sniper team.
He saw action, killed. And half a world away
Other villages mourn sons and daughters
Lost to his unerring eye.

Chuck Toll

The War: Civics Lesson on Succession

Lest there be any question of the long-term effects
Upon children of growing up within a 'nation at war, '
Particularly a conflict so broadly discussed and questioned,
A conflict so pervasively in the news and debated at home
I offer the following as Exhibit A:

My nine year-old watches the evening news over my shoulder,
Walks away, then returns carrying his favorite stuffed animal.
He waits politely until there is a break for ads, then says,

'The President is a really bad man for starting that war, and
getting so many people killed, and then lying about everything.
But if he's going to be assassinated, I think the Vice President
Needs to be killed first so he can't become the President when
The President dies.'

My parental world implodes around me as I look at his small face,
Innocent as Eden. I flush appalled at my failures of omission and
comission as a father. But my deepest anger is reserved for those
whose acts and outlooks cannot bear examination by young minds
Seeking to understand and grapple with the complexities of life.

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Chuck Toll