**Poetry Series**

# Eric Cockrell

## - poems -

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## Eric Cockrell

i am 57 years old... have been writing poetry for over 40 years... had a troubled youth, was in trouble a lot, was a drug addict... survived it all... have worked a variety of jobs... have 4 grown children,3 grandchildren. was a member of the North Carolina Writer's Roundtable for a while... write poetry, songs, political and spiritual commentaries...
am somewhere between a Buddhist and a gnostic Christian...
am a renagade socialist by political nature...
believe most of all that compassion is the one true path!

Works:

'Scar Tissue', self-published in the 1970's
'Awakening', self-published in the 1980's

**A Child Is Dying**

for every tree you cut down,
a child is dying.
for every barrel of oil that
you drill and spill,
a child is dying.
for every coal mine you
rape the earth with,
a child is dying.
for all the nuclear waste
you cannot dispose of,
a child is dying.

for every country you bomb,
a child is dying.
for every chemical you spray
on your vegetables,
a child is dying.

for every river you dam & drain,
a child is dying.
for every oil field you own,
a child is dying.

for every animal you drive
to the brink of extinction,
a child is dying.
for every smokestack, every sweatshop,
and every synthetic thought,
a child is dying.

for every tree you cut down....

Eric Cockrell

**Beneath The Tree**

how many deaths
must i die?
how many times left alone
on some nameless shore,
watching the storm carry
my boat off to sea?

how many blackbirds dead
beneath the tree?

if i die inside of you
will you remember my name?
or am i just an old coat
hanging in the back of the closet?
a hat your grandfather wore....
a deck of cards forgotten in a drawer....
a spider's web clinging to your feet!

Eric Cockrell

**Black Crows**

Darkness and light, wrong and right
thoughts bleed and dissolve, dreams evolve
paper and smoke, churn and stroke
prayers drip like sweat, slavery and debt

White trash fires, unholy liars
truth falls off the edge, desire walks the ledge
political drugs, who picks the judge
hammers of fear, moments lost to years

Graves open and close, nuclear rose
black shadows turn, pages crumple and burn
lightning or gunfire, stakes higher and higher
death clock chimes, wind thru the pines...
black crows on the lines... black crows on the lines...

Mothers crying and cold, babies bought and sold
welfare Cadillacs, anxiety attacks
trailor tub meth, lonesome last breath
kneeling by the bed, prayers for the dead

Runaways lost, who pays the cost
nursing home ghosts, headstones and posts
pictures turning yellow, goodbyes and hellos
people folded and spent, no messengers sent...

Graves open and close, nuclear rose
black shadows turn, pages crumple and burn
lightning or gunfire, stakes higher and higher
death clock chimes, wind thru the pines...
black crows on the lines... black crows on the lines...

Eric Cockrell

**Buddha Steps # 3**

everyday,
i try to let go
of something else....

this just makes me
realize...

how many more things
i have

to let go of!

Eric Cockrell

**Buddha Steps # 8**

the trees are alive!
even in the dead of winter,
if you're still,

you can feel their pulse,
waiting....

chainsaws and axes,
matches and hearth.

you are alive!
just below your numbness,
if you're still,

you can feel your pulse,
waiting...

chainsaws and axes,
matches and hearth.

God is alive!
just beyond your conceptions,
if you're still,

you can feel eternity's pulse,
waiting...

chainsaws and axes,
matches and hearth.

Eric Cockrell

**Buddha Steps #4**

i cant hate you!
no matter how angry
you make me,
how many times you hurt me,
use me, abuse me.

no matter what you believe,
what language you speak,
what color you are.

what party you're a part of,
how you dress,
who you screw.
or what you dream of.

because everytime i look at you,
i see me.
and everytime i hear you cry
i feel the tears of God.

Eric Cockrell

**Cannot, Or Can I?**

i cannot stop world hunger,
tho i've been one of the hungry.
i cannot heal the brokenhearted,
tho my heart has been broken.
i cannot put an end to prejudice,
tho there are many colors in my soul.
i cannot disarm the violent ones,
for i've been violent too.
i cannot put an end to greed,
tho i am a victim of its hand.
i cannot heal the environment,
that i've been a part of killing.
i cannot fill the cup of the lonely,
tho i've drunk from it often.
i cannot free the political prisoners,
that my apathy put in chains.
i cannot change the path of despair,
on which i walk, numb and faceless....

i cannot... or can i?

Eric Cockrell

**Children Of Ignorance**

the children of ignorance
with bits in their mouths,
led blindfolded to the slaughter
without a thought or a prayer.

whipped into a frenzy by lies,
wrapped with golden ribbons,
sold by street vendors in suits
with hollow faces and marble eyes.

fed the 'word of God' with shotguns,
wearing crucifix painted robes;
selling their daughters for gasoline,
and their sons to political wars.

marching to hatred and violence,
leaving the weak to suffer and fall.
in the name of patriotism and Wall Street,
led like dumb sheep to die....

and they're already dead!

Eric Cockrell

**Dead Silence Of The Heart**

I dreamt of strawberry-rhubarb pie,
and fresh brewed black coffee...
long slow tender sensual sex,
lips hungry for mine.

The sound of rain in the night,
wrapping the earth in stillness.
walking in the frozen sunrise
with my old dog by my side.

Climbing Hawksbill on a spring day,
looking down over the gorge in awe.
barefoot, planting a garden,
believing in the sun and the rain.

Playing an old Gibson on the porch,
deep rich tones lost in the breeze.
the taste of good bourbon, and a smoke,
paying tribute to the sunset.

Standing by the stone in a cementary,
talking without words, still heard.
writing poetry with a shovel,
and a borrowed pen...

Flying with the hawk to eternity,
sprouting green leaves
on frozen branches... listening
for the sound of your voice...

In the dead silence of the heart.

Eric Cockrell

**Dream In B Minor**

i dreamt Jesus came back last night
& walked thru the tents & tarps
& the mud & the cholera of Haiti...
amidst the bodies & the children crying;
and He turned back towards Jerusalem,
weeping for the sins of apathy
to be crucified again.

i dreamt Jesus came back last night
& walked thru the streets & the cities of America...
thru the addiction & the poverty,
the homelessness, the prejudice, the lostness...
to the halls & cathedrals of Washington
where life is bought & sold & blood is cheaper
than oil...

& He turned away from the cross,
and went fishing!

Eric Cockrell

**Epiphany, Dead Man Walking**

i learned to walk again,
the day you drove away
and left me standing in the drive...

i learned to see again,
staring at old photographs
in a book hid away.

i learned to think again,
thinking, and rethinking
every move and every action.

i learned to feel again,
struck dumb with waves of sorrow,
with blood on my lips.

i learned to cry again,
in the dark and sleepless night,
when no one else could see.

i learned to fight again,
pushed back against the wall
with nothing left to lose.

i learned to pray again,
to a God that doesnt answer,
from the gates of hell.

i learned to dream again,
violent shaking nightmares,
waking up to a cold sweat.

i learned to love again
to cherish every moment,
every touch forgotten.

i learned to walk again,
and walked off into the sunset
with our hearts in my hands.

Eric Cockrell

**Epitaph**

love is a forest fire,
the burning bush, smoke
rising from the embers
of a moment lost to eternity...
love is a healing touch,
the nourishing hand,
the echo of the self
whispering from its deepest
recesses... and answering!

love is murder... destroying
everything in its path.
love is a knife, cutting the soul
from its prison of identity...
love is a trash truck...
picking up the pieces of
lifetimes thrown to the curb...
love is a broken window
in a house where nobody lives...

love is the bitter taste
i keep spitting, walking down
this old road again...
yet love is the epitaph,
written in blood and sweat,
that my living leaves behind.

Eric Cockrell

**Forty Dollar Bathtub**

a forty dollar galvanized bathtub!
carrying buckets of water up the hill
to heat on the old cook stove...
i watched you bathing in the kitchen,
in the old house down on Henry River.
fried Spam and pork 'n beans,
moonlit trips to the outhouse....
stray dogs on the porch.
endless truckloads of wood scraps;
we made love through winter nights,
so cold in the room you could see your breath!
you licked the frost from my moustache,
and the world went on without us....
a forty dollar bathtub, buckets of water,
nothing needed, nothing more!

Eric Cockrell

**Howling**

the pregnant lion, the burning bush,
the hammered flute, well gone dry.
without a prayer, the eagle falls
in blackened cinders to the earth.

the food stamp mom, her head down,
children stare with blank milky eyes.
there's another man down in the project,
news at five, news at five.

deserted smokestacks stare at an angry sky,
buildings filled with rats and ghosts.
abandoned cars, abandoned lives,
old gas pumps rusting in the wind....

and the wind blows and howls,
ripping shingles from empty houses, ...
breaking limbs from trees long dead;
drowning out the sound of children's voices....

slamming doors and breaking windows,
carryng the fated owl to the eaves.
blowing at my back like the fires of hell,
blowing in my face with the freedom of loss.

the pregnant lion, the burning bush,
the hammered flute, well gone dry.
without a prayer, the eagle falls
in blackened cinders to the earth....

and no one hears....no one feels...
the lone wolf howling....
the spirits of death howling...
the eyes of God, ... howling!

Eric Cockrell

**Hunger, And Nothing**

i cant do this anymore...
i cant look into my children's eyes...
my wife's tears fall like thunder
to an empty bowl...
i have nothing to buy with,
nothing to trade, nowhere to beg,
and nothing to steal...
the baby's sick, there's nothing
i can do... except watch her die
in her momma's nothing arms...
hungry, and hopeless...
nothing i can do.

Eric Cockrell

**Listening**

listening... for the sound
your hand makes when it touches mine...
for the words your eyes whisper
when you laugh...
for the song your heart sings,
and the prayer your sleeping body
becomes, pressed against mine.
for the sound of the cicadas
chanting in drunken rhythm...
for the boiling of beans
in my grandmother's kitchen.
for the crush of the bat
driving the ball deep into the gap.
for the gurgle of creekwater
running o'er a melon wedged tight.
for the sharp crack of the gun
and the bullets whistling overhead.
for the cry of the hungry baby
and the slap against his mother's face.
for the clank of the leg irons
across a cold concrete floor.
for the rip of shovels digging,
and the wail of the widow.
for the song of the workers
bent neath the sun in the field.
for the speech of the visionary
who already smells like death.
for the pounding of the oil rigs
raping the earth without feeling.
for the lies of the politician
stealing the souls of the people.
for the sound of hate's fists
pounding the gay boy to death.
for the scream of raging empty
when they bring a mother's boy home.
for the sound of the door,
closing for the last time.
for the memory of an old hymn,
calling from beyond the river.
listening... for the moan of lovers,
bodies slapping in the night.
for the wild beating of a heart
dissolving nameless into mine...
for the echo of something more
than a drink and a feeling...
that needs to breathe, to run, to fly,
and to dance...
listening....

Eric Cockrell

**Melting Pot**

many colored drops of rain,
as if the rainbow melted.
childrens' voices crying out,
different sounds, different languages.

all the same language.

millions of hands reaching for
a hand searching for a bridge.
hunger, need, and the emptiness
that drives, that prays, that bleeds.

all the same language.

kindred souls wrapped in fallen leaves,
that crumble, and return to dirt.
millions of eyes turned inward,
under the same sky, looking for tomorrow.

all the same language.

millions of eyes turned inward,
under the same sky, looking for today!
many colored drops of rain.
as if the rainbow melted.

all the same language.
all, speaking human!

Eric Cockrell

**Morning Refuge Prayer**

i take refuge in the Buddha
who shows us the path.
i take refuge in the Dharma
that teaches us to walk in compassion.
i take refuge in the Sangha
the family of living beings working together for peace.

i take refuge in Jesus
in the way that He lived and died.
in the Kingdom of Heaven within us
that heals the sick and feeds the hungry.

i take refuge in the Tao
in the uncarved block.
in water flowing over rocks
finding its own way.

i take refuge in the Great Spirit
in the embrace of Mother Earth.
i take refuge in the wind and rain
in the thunder and lightning,
in the stillness of night.

i take refuge in the howl of the wolf,
in the eyes of small children.
in the truth that breaks down the wall
between living and existing, between sorrow and joy.

Eric Cockrell

**Nothing Owned, Nothing Lost**

i dont feel the need
  to ever own again.
houses, cars, credit cards
mean nothing to me!
 we ate well tonite,
 the house is quiet
and the man in the mirror
 is fading day by day.

we never own each other,
never even own our children.
all that is will pass
into memory.
and that is enough.

all that will remain
is the kind word,
the soft touch,
the moments spent listening,
the hand-up given without thinking...
and the pictures painted
and left behind... without taking,
without grasping, without naming!

Eric Cockrell

**One Last Cigarette**

i took off my carpenter's apron,
laid my hammer on the nightstand.
unloaded my old shotgun,
and stood it against the corner.
i lowered the flag, put out the fire,
put sheets across the windows....
turned off the lights, pulled off my boots,
and walked out barefooted into the night!

sometimes you just get tired of
 trying to save a world
   that doesnt want saving...
when you cant even manage
 to save yourself from yourself!

and sometimes it's just about the night,
 and the way the darkness feels
 wrapped 'round you in perfect stillness...
   standing barefoot in the grass,
    smoking one last cigarette.

Eric Cockrell

**Something More**

there is a part of me in you,
in every move you make,
every thought you think,
in every sleepless night...

there is a part of you in me,
in every time i do the right thing,
every gentle and good thought,
in everything i believe...

there is a part of us in God,
and a part of God in us;
that cannot be seperated
and still feed the flame of living.

there is a part of love, and the whole,
written by our destinies.
you and i, and something more,
that words cannot define.

Eric Cockrell

**Suicide**

'i cant do this anymore.'
he shakes his head to clear
the cobwebs.
staring blindly around the kitchen,
nothing seemed real,
nothing made sense.

late notices, disconnection notices,
eviction notice walls of paper
falling in.

children fighting over nothing,
or something, what the hell!
woman staring blankly at the tv.
she hadnt seen him in years.

invisible, untouchable, alone.
alone till it stank,
like dried vomit in the heat.

he couldnt remember, couldnt even
remember what or why or when.
and the hands on the clock
thundered and crawled.

he walked out the door
into the yard, staring at
the night sky, and winced.

putting the gun to his head
with one move he pulled
the trigger.

and a lone tree fell
in the darkness.

Eric Cockrell

**The Best Poem**

when you plant a seed
in the ground, and
water it, work it, weed it
till it grows... you've written

the best poem you'll ever write.

when you make a baby,
waiting and planning for birth;
and you raise this child to adulthood
with respect... you've written

the best poem you'll ever write.

when you live your life
working honestly, giving
all that you are and can be,
never holding back... you've written

the best poem you'll ever write.

when you go to death openly
with no regrets, not clinging
to dreams that were not real,
owning no one... you've written

the best poem you'll ever write.

Eric Cockrell

**The Hand**

only the human hand,
  the caring hand,
 the hand covered in blood
 and filth, the hand swollen

bruised, and beaten...
 the open hand,
  not a fist anymore hand,
   not afraid to let go hand,
 never letting go hand...

feed the baby, plow the field hand,
  stroke the face of
 the old woman dying hand...
  light the fires, sweep the floors hand...

the praying hand, the picking hand,
 the paint the soul hand...
only the human hand
  can touch with the heart of God!

Eric Cockrell

**The Poet Endureth!**

i stare at my face in the mirror,
and count with the heavy rhythm
of the clock... moment by moment...
every feeling, born and unborn,
every taste, intoxicating, burning the lips...
every smell, faint and overpowering...
every touch... real and imagined...
and who am i? and what have i to give?
i am the sound that you cant define,
cant put to words, cant control.
i am the fire that warms you, and destroys you...
the water you drink that drowns you;
the wind at your back, the infidel wind
that whispers to you in the middle of the night.
i am the small child, lost and crying,
i am the murderer, still someone's son.
i am the woman you'd die for,
that leaves you broken and bleeding.
i am the priest, the prophet, the thief,
the addict, the whore...
i am everything you believe in,
everything you're scared to admit you feel.
i am the tear no one sees you cry,
i am the fear you keep hidden.
i am the hungry man standing in line,
whose family is long gone.
i am the casket they buried your mother in...
i am the words written in stone,
that no one ever reads.
i am the stranger who steps in front of the car,
pushes you away, and is killed.
i am the path grown over,
... that you'd forgotten!
i am the kiss, the touch of flesh,
the cry of passion in the night.
i am the soul damned to hell,
burned at the stake by the righteous!
i am the hand that touches forbidden places,
that holds yours when you're alone.
i am every mistake you've ever made,
and some you want to make!
i am a lost soul with a glimpse of eternity,
nothing more, nothing less...
i am the poet endureth!  i am nothing
but the dust beneath your feet...
i am merely the echo of what makes you human,
i have no name... i am everybody!

Eric Cockrell

**Thinking Man's Blues**

i was thinking about Jesus
i was thinking about robbing a bank
thinking about the band a playin'
while the Titanic sank
thinking 'bout salvation
thinking about getting free
thinking and a wondering
do you ever think about me?

i was thinking about generations
i was thinking about saving grace
i was thinking about truth and lies
thinking about flesh and lace
thinking about redemption
and rivers running to the sea
thinking and a wondering
do you ever think about me?

i was thinking about the Dharma
'bout Martin Luther King
thinking about Merle Haggard
thinking about James Dean
thinking about the costs of war
about moral depravity
thinking and a wondering
do you ever think about me?
thinking and a wondering
do you ever think about me?

Eric Cockrell

**Voices**

our love is spillt
onto winter's dead earth.
amid the rubble of
decaying leaves, and
unnamed frost...

only an echo
of living remains;
and the promise
born in memory
is not enough.

the arms and legs
of our passion
cut up as firewood
and left to dry.

our cries of hunger
diminished, fade
into the sounds of the wind
freezing the panes
of windows locked in death.

epitaphs scratched in stone
and children that took wing...
now voices no longer familier
speak of nothing, or
dont speak at all.

Eric Cockrell

**Waiting For The Storm**

snow birds screeching in the trees,
bare limbs bent with time and promise..
desolate, hungry clouds from the south,
and the quiet before the storm.

and those i love are sleeping, or far away.
there's nothing that can be done just now.
all the fires and smoke are as distant
as hours and days will allow.

stillness, and waiting... for something
that hasnt taken form or spirit yet.
walking through the museum of my heart,
searching for answers, and finality.

i cant find God in the garden,
or in the pounding of the big guns.
or in the broken bodies strewn by greed,
or in the voices wailing with hurt and hunger.

every direction leads to lostness.
prayers fall like ash in the wind.
and i'm left with the sound of the
snow birds calling, waiting for the storm.

Eric Cockrell

**Washington**

They're selling plastic Jesus's
in the halls of the senate,
putting band-aids on open wounds
that ooze when you breathe...

Trading worthless paper, cigar deals,
'in God we trust', or not!
puffing out their ashen chests,
strutting like empty headed roosters.

And the children of the dream
bow their heads and blindly walk;
the meat grinder turns his wheel,
the spineless monkey dances!

An empire falls in sterile silence,
throw the helpless to the lions!
no food, no water, no oil, no power,
gridlock, and a broken bow!

Eric Cockrell

**Whiskey And Jesus**

He said, it's whiskey and Jesus
it's grandkids at the door
it's the woman lying speechless
she cant take it anymore
it's the roar of desperation
that sickens and devours
it's the stillness of alone
that turns minutes into hours
it's whiskey and Jesus

He said, it's whiskey and Jesus
it's the hoe in the field
the hawk circling overhead
dust on the windowsill
it's empty shelves in the pantry
callouses on his hands
it's nowhere to turn
the pride of a man...
it's whiskey and Jesus

He said, it's whiskey and Jesus
it's the lines 'neath his eyes
it's the tight lipped anger
that never questions why
it's the memories and ashes
of a thousand highway miles
the hard face of dignity
painted by the trials...
it's whiskey and Jesus...

Eric Cockrell

**Who am I?**

who am i?
the man who plowed your garden,
and tended your crops;
who hoed the weeds
in the hot summer sun.
i am the man who cut your wood,
sawed it into stacks,
preparing for the coming winter.
i am the carpenter
who built your home;
with boards of flesh,
and nails made of blood and tears.
i am the infidel
who brought you a holy candle,
and made love to you
while it burned down.
who am I
i am the minstrel in your courtyard
dodging bullets and angry lynch mobs.
i am the soldier you sent to battle,
not expecting him to come home.
i am the doctor of your heart
mixing balms of listening and caring.
i am the wolf that mounts you,
teeth gleeming in the moonlight.
i am the prayer you cant put to words,
and its answer!

who am I?
i am the reflection of your face
in the darkened window.
i am the bridge you walk across
to reach tomorrow...
i am the price of a lifetime,
the cost of passion.
i am the fire that burns,
the pot that boils,
the cup that's filled...
i am the colors,
the stink, the raw taste
of living.
i am the hawk that circles
o'er your freedom...
the hand that opens the door!

Eric Cockrell

**Who Turns Out The Lights?**

what happens when
the United States of America
 cant pay the rent?
i mean, do we get evicted?

 do we pack up our senators
  and congressmen, and
   load them on the back
 of an old pickup truck...
 and send them into the great
   beyond?  what happens?

 do Native Americans get it back?
   do the Chinese take over?

 and who turns out the lights?

Eric Cockrell