Poetry Series

Jeff Gangwer

- 231 poems -

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Jeff Gangwer (September 23,1984)

Jeff Gangwer grew up in Parkdale, Keizer, Woodburn, and Salem, Oregon. He served a fulltime mission in the Philippines from 2003 to 2005. He attended Brigham Young University – Idaho where he majored in English Education and minored in American Government Education. In 2011, he began teaching English Language Arts in Tooele, Utah. He enjoys movies, music, audiobooks, and stand-up comedy. He also enjoys hiking, paintball, road running, shotgun shooting, and tennis. He lives in Stansbury Park, Utah with his lovely wife, Rebeca.

"...‘mallows at the coals"

I watch ‘n' rotate
these ‘mallows at the coals
‘til they yellow in the heat—
an' brown on the stick—
proof that patience is a virtue—
an' ‘mallows are a miracle

Jeff Gangwer

"...a baby was birthed"

I was hired to teach...
...because a baby was birthed

How odd

I never learned the child's name—
(Or its gender)
And really, I never wanna know it

I think that knowing would destroy
Some of the mystique—
Some of the magic—
Some of the romance—
That made my first year as an educator so memorable

And I won't forget it:
I was hired to teach...
...because a baby was birthed

I could wax eloquent about the great Circle of Life
Or shrug and smile at the yarns of chance and circumstance...
...but Time might place that splendid son-of-a-b***h in my classroom—
Another "f****t" with morning breath—
Another fat kid with gynecomastia—
Another dumbass with questions like,
"Do we need to put our names on this? "—
Another nail driven into my coffin—
"Here lies Jeffrey Alan Gangwer—
"Husband, father, teacher"—
Something nice to chisel into the marble

Jeff Gangwer

"...a final glimpse of the last ebb tide"

Did you ever travel...
...into a world that didn't exist...
...until you arrived to meet it...?

Did you feel that the people there were faceless or nameless...
...that they neither lived nor died nor played...
...until you arrived to meet them...?

Did you amble freely through their crowded city streets...
...under a cloudburst sky that couldn't fail...
...only to find yourself "at home" amidst strangers...?

Did you pass through with a smile...
...using God's good humor to fill the voids...
...and discover a love for the common man...?

Did you connect...
...in every way possible...
...with this world that didn't exist—until you arrived to meet it...?

Did you find what was missing...?

Were you...?

Did you find "the missing piece"...?

Was it you...?

The world at large should never exist as a dichotomy—
"Us" or "them"

Instead,
The world at large should exist as many worlds—
In a great succession of connections—
Without missing pieces—
From here to there—
From departures to arrivals—
From known to unknown worlds—
Where one would be wise
And one would do well
To run—
Or even sprint—
Over sharp rocks—
With muscles aching—
With nothing held back—
In order to catch a final glimpse of the last ebb tide
Before it quietly retreats and disappears into an endless ocean

Jeff Gangwer

"...a season of peace"

At 2: 35...
...my students spill out from my classroom...
...and leave me alone for a season of peace....

Jeff Gangwer

"...Dairy Queen it! "

The state of Utah pays me to educate and inspire the youth...
...so I impart to them the gift of knowledge, which,
Oddly enough, often escapes my judicious lips
In the form of a singsongy one-liner—
Practical advice for the young Americans:

"When the doctor asks for a stool sample...
"...Dairy Queen it! "

In addition to the song, I mimic the act of gathering a stool sample—
So they know what to expect when they see the workers at Dairy Queen—
The overpriced chocolate soft serve twisting and twirling into the paper cups

Jeff Gangwer

"...from neck to nuts"

The gentleman
standing
right behind me
in this really long line
is tattooed
from neck to nuts—
and when I spot
the Mara Salvatrucha insignia
crudely inked
into his ghastly neck,
I deduce that he probably
stabbed
or
shot
somebody to death—
for reasons
that God only knows—
so I inch forward a little bit—
in order to find
some
distance—
so I can clear my head
and think about something else—
something pleasant—
something soft and cuddly—
like a moist vulva, ready for penetration—
ERR, maybe I should expunge
that line about the vulva—
but I'd rather think about that than some
random act of gangland violence—
some poor f****r's brains turned to soup after
a nine millimeter slug drilled through the back of his skull

Jeff Gangwer

"...I failed to find it"

They taught me to develop
"...a personal relationship with Jesus"...
...but I failed to find it

I even baptized a family of five in the Pacific Ocean

They dressed in white jumpsuits
And walked into the cold saltwater of their supposed salvation

I was happy because my hard work had finally paid off

I learned that baptism and happiness could be synonymous

But a personal relationship with Jesus?

I failed to find it...
...but I'm not bitter;
I'm grateful

Always accept what you receive—
And whatever you experience

Simplicity demands such—
Even if you fail to find or develop
"...a personal relationship with Jesus"—

The Same who looks down from grey heavens—
The Man of the millenniums

Jeff Gangwer

"...I return to the Source"

A jisei no ku:

As a man, I depart
From living; from dreams—
And in death, I find solace—
And I return to the Source

Jeff Gangwer

"...I worry about breaking wind during our lovemaking"

Before I met you, I worried that my future would be punctuated with misery, inconsequence, and loneliness—that I would die before anybody other than my mother cared that I lived

Now I worry about breaking wind during our lovemaking—the beans and the rice that we ate standing in direct conflict with our goal of mutual sexual satisfaction

Jeff Gangwer

"...in his car seat"

A little boy baked to death in his car seat

His father was at work, earning for his son's future

We just read the news story and said, "Wow. That's sad."

I imagined the boy's brain baking like an apple cinnamon muffin

I didn't say anything to you—not wanting to paint such a morbid picture

Jeff Gangwer

"...like a broken rec—"

I shouldn't have t'—
I shouldn't have t'—
I shouldn't have t'—
I shouldn't have t' repeat myself like a broken rec—
—like a broken rec—
—like a broken rec—
—like a broken rec—
I shouldn't have t' repeat myself like a broken record

Jeff Gangwer

"...like Doctor Evil"

On April First,
I decide to tease my students,
So I write the following on the white board:
"Chronicle the development of our English language from its West Germanic origins to the present, ‘urban, ' text-filled wasteland of the contemporary age.
"Research and cite your sources.
"Be specific."

They scramble for pencils and papers and I laugh like Doctor Evil

Jeff Gangwer

"...not our whales"

Men: let's go punch their whales

(But not our whales)

Jeff Gangwer

"...of every lucky day"

I walk with a head cast down
So I can pick up the pennies of every lucky day

And sometimes, with eyes to the pavement—
Even though I don't believe in luck—I find a nickel or a quarter—

But never enough to buy a condom from the dispenser at the gas station

Jeff Gangwer

"...on Cascade Dairy"

I learned to work on Cascade Dairy—
The ol' Carter Homestead in Parkdale, Oregon—
A farm that sat eleven miles, as the crow flies,
From the base of Mount Hood—
The tallest mountain in the whole state—
The best place for a poet to begin his odyssey

Jeff Gangwer

"...on the hook"

Please forgive me—
I was watering the flowers and I forgot to hang your towel on the hook

Next time—and you have my word on this—
I'll feed you some of that cantaloupe while you shower—and you won't have t' drip dry

Jeff Gangwer

"...quite capable of civility"

I watched Downfall—
Translated from Der Untergang—
This German movie where Bruno Ganz plays Adolf Hitler—
So much so that you forget you're watching a brilliant performance—
And I realized while watching that those who hate are also quite capable of civility

(I know I am)

Jeff Gangwer

"...rounding that corner"

Huffing and chugging,
I turn back to the south—
Back toward the house—
And rounding that corner—
My Sauconys landing in the glass—
I see where that van and that S.U.V. met—
Where several lives ended—
Pop, pop, pop—
Like lapsing light bulbs—
Snapping sparks in the void—
Like the crusted bodies of earthworms—
The ones that crawled from the wet lawn
Only to shrivel up and die on the hot sidewalk—
The poor, naked bastards

Jeff Gangwer

"...should we believe in miracles? "

I took you into my arms...
...and since our first meeting,
I have not let you go

I held your hands...
...and with a gentle touch,
I have not let you go

I kissed your lips with fervor and with passion...
...and in love, delicate and sweet,
I will never let you go

Our meeting was one of chance—
The dice hitting the board—
Or should we believe in miracles?

Lost amongst others,
I looked and I found you—
Never to let you go

A friend,
A companion,
A love for life's purpose

Into my arms,
I will take you;
I will hold you—

Forever to cherish;
Forever to love—
Without a breath if necessary

For my Friend,
For my Companion,
For my Love

We are no longer lost, for we truly found each other

Jeff Gangwer

"...so I can disappear"

Like you,
I shower so I can disappear
From the world for a minute or two—

Just me an' the sounds of
Gangster rap and rushing water—
Soapy water spiraling down into the drain

Jeff Gangwer

"...the niggling but inevitable feeling of an oncoming compunction"

At the IHOP restaurant,
I finish an order of Chicken and Waffles
And drink down two cups of what passes for "hot chocolate"
And to avoid the niggling but inevitable feeling of an oncoming compunction,
I promise myself that I will skip my next two meals—
Both lunch and dinner—
But later, admittedly, I fall asleep in the summer sun
And I dream of a giggling blonde with ribboned pigtails—no joke—
Who lies down with me an' rubs my swollen tummy in aid of its digestion

Jeff Gangwer

"...the Pacific Ocean revealed nothing"

He strolled through paradise—
Through the humidity—
Torrid heat waves rising

He walked as the hajji—
In humility—
Like any other everyman without umbrage

He thought about time and distance

He thought about love and love lost

He thought about his choices and his decisions

He thought about his fears—
That which unites us all

He questioned his state of being—
His very existence—
Even as the sun hit his face
And a breeze blew into his frame

He questioned....

The sands compressed under his bare feet

Paradise....

He looked to the waters...
...but the Pacific Ocean revealed nothing

Jeff Gangwer

"...thm rmght thmng"

We were brushing our teeth in the little hotel bathroom
In the luxurious Presidential Suite
At the Anniversary Inn—

The first time that we brushed as a married couple—

Mister President and his First Lady

With a mouth full of toothpaste suds, I said,
"Wm dmd thm rmght thmng."

She agreed

I smiled—
Then spat

(We flossed as well)

We were stuck in that awful place between "tired"...
...and "restless"—
Excited...
...but sleepy

My heart was full

Later, I turned the bust of Abraham Lincoln around—
Away from the bed that creaks

We did the right thing

Jeff Gangwer

"...to nowhere but here"

After months of planning
And weeks of preparation,
Rebeca and I finally hit the road

We stop to take pictures along the highway

Our final destination?

Bear Lake State Park—
Just north and east of Salt Lake City—
A scenic lake on the borders of Utah and Idaho

With the Saturn loaded
And the music spinning,
We follow the route on our printed map

We stop to purchase batteries, chips and salsa, and soda pop

We arrive in the midday heat
And check into our charming campsite:

South Loop, Camp 13—twenty-eight dollars of peace and quiet—
Just the two of us—and my four-pound dog, Chewy, a Chihuahua

We set up our two-man tent
And build our camp and fire—
Our home 'n' hearth for the next three days

Chewy roams leashlessly, wagging his tail while exploring a new world

In the afternoon, before mealtime,
We walk with Chewy along the nearby shore—
Where the timeless sand and the fresh lake water meet

We wander while Chewy investigates the remnants of an old fish carcass

Later, Rebeca cooks our dinner

She chops the vegetables and I grill the meat

We work and feast together—one of the tastiest meals we've known

We warm ourselves near the heat and flames as brush and wood burn in our pit

By firelight and lamplight, I read to Rebeca—
Some romance novel she checked out from the library—
And she listens carefully to my "Language Arts" reading voice

We talk about the love in our hearts, the tenets of evolution and creation, and the various possibilities of God

At night,

With the moon riding high,
We snuggle on the little bed under a pile of blankets

We touch and hold each other while making love in the tent

Then we stay close and warm as we fall to sleep and drift off to nowhere but here

Jeff Gangwer

"...to speak with Truth"

In my vision of the highest heaven,
I walked with God through an orchard of pears—
Fruit that snapped free from the branches when we picked it

I learned that to walk with Him is to speak with Truth—
That which was, is, and ever will be—
All He revealed of His creations

We walked as
Father and son—
Pears in our bellies

Jeff Gangwer

"...too young to know"

My earliest memory of my father involved a newly installed toilet
And the apple that I flushed down its watery gullet

I was too young to think...and too young to know....

For years now, I've chuckled at that man's fury

Jeff Gangwer

"...two snails humping"

I've never seen two snails humping,
But I know that they do—
The male behind the female—
Plowing away into glory—at a snail's pace—
But for joy or for reproduction, no one knows....

Jeff Gangwer

"...without our consent"

A navy blue sun
Rose over the black waters

It rose over waves that collapsed
And crashed savagely into the rock walls near the shore

The water pooled and bubbled there,
Then gradually subsided without our consent

Despite man and his follies,
The ascendant tide rolls forth—
With power beyond our control and
Beauty beyond our invention or making

Jeff Gangwer

"An apple fell..."

An apple fell—
Just two hours after I picked up thirty—
From the tree in the backyard that we keep for no reason

And through the sliding glass window,
I can see myself, ax in hand, chopping it down—
A few years from now

Jeff Gangwer

"Boring" and "Awesome"

"Boring" is boring, but
"Awesome" is anything but

Jeff Gangwer

"Can I just...? "

Everybody wants me to
be something for somebody—
or someone for something else—

But can I just be
a man for today—
no rules, but today?

Can I just step out from the
sliding glass door—out to the backyard—
so I can be free from the hats and labels of society?

Can I just mosey about without
shoes or socks and let the blades
of the grass slip between my toes...?

Can I just be
me for a change—
if only for today...?

Jeff Gangwer

"Dolphin"

I look out at the sales floor at Prosper, Inc. for the first time
And like one of the Wonka kids, I think,
The Chocolate Room is beautiful....

It vibrates with activity:
Two rows of headstrong "consultants" stir with excitement and productivity

It's an office of nerds, geeks, dorks, jocks, athletes, body builders, wake boarders, crack heads, speed freaks, former gang members, off-the-wagon alcoholics, hicks, d***s, pricks, jerks, a**holes, jack-offs, douche bags, old-timers, motivation junkies, Wal-Mart cowboys, and Wall Street wannabes—
And some of them are two or three of these
(And Joe Bish was four of these—but we couldn't believe anything he told us)

And in the old days,
Way back in the 2000s,
Some of these guys were snorting coke at their workstations like those absurd American maniacs from The Wolf of Wall Street

It's a melting pot—
A cultural supreme pizza—
An exhilarating place to work

They sell coaching programs for stay-at-homers
That wanna "make it big" online

Some sit at desks;
Others stand in small cubicles

They dial and talk;
Dial and talk

The world spins on its axis—
And these bastards dial and talk—! —almost in vain—
The only thing they know to earn their cheddar

I'm new on the floor and they call me "Dolphin"—
"A gay shark, " they say;
They call me this ‘cause I'm a poetry fag...not a salesman

But in the end...I swam upstream...to safer waters—away from the sharks....

Jeff Gangwer

"I get it! "

My favorite scene from H.B.O.'s The Sopranos:

Tony Soprano—
Still high on peyote—
Raises his hands to the morning sky above the Nevada desert
And shouts,
"I get it!
"I get it! "

I believe that getting it
Meant everything, but also nothing for Tony

He seeks...
...and finds...but he's unable to explain just what....

His journey was a spiritual one—
Like ours—
But getting it was neither an epiphany nor a terrible ignorance

Or maybe the peyote was talking

Jeff Gangwer

"In a manner of speaking..."

These chunks of tomato taste like s**t—
In a manner of speaking—
And now their seeds are stuck to all this lettuce

Jeff Gangwer

"In the year 1984..."

In the year 1984,
In the month of September,
On the fourth Sunday of the month—
And after the agony of thirty-eight hours of labor—
Nancy pushed her only son into mortality

He was blue from a lack of oxygen and a nurse put a hat on his head

'It was worth it, ' she said

Jeff Gangwer

"It's hard t' hate you..."

It's hard t' hate you
when you stand in our kitchen,
in last year's socks—
however worn or discolored—
carefully eating that buttered cracker for breakfast—
dressed in those peach-colored panties
and in that white spaghetti strap tank top—
your finger pushing that last crumb through your chewing smile

Jeff Gangwer

"Lost to the darkness..."

I saw the death of innocence in a city
Cast with shadows and filled with degradation—
Permanent homes for the dregs in a society without hope—
Lost to the darkness of yesteryears,
Groping for musical notes and words of comfort—
Their stolen dreams like the blood of a slain champion that
Spattered and dried to the brickwork—
Mothers without milk, fathers without judgment,
Daughters without morality, and sons without scruples....

Jeff Gangwer

"Michael Jackson"

For my "big finish, "
They push me backstage,
Give me a black plastic fedora,
A black jacket from ‘87—the Bad era—
And instructions to "Baila como Michael Jackson"—
And after they pull the velvet curtains open,
I spin out onto the planks and moon walk for the win—
Because—and this is the God's honest truth—
I'd rather be "Michael Jackson" at the night show
Than the King of Pop at age fifty—
Stiff with rigor mortis at Holmby Hills—
Dead in all that crusty makeup—
White—err, Black—err, pale—I guess—
And rich—err, eccentric—or whatever they call it

Jeff Gangwer

"Non sequiturs exist..."

Non sequiturs exist
So we can drive to the nearest Apollo Burger joint
And order and eat one of the tastiest pastrami burgers under the heavens—
The beefy bastard now in gobbets, struggling to metabolize in my bulging breadbasket—
Now a nagging side stitch like a mad midget's punch to my left love handle while my feet draggle awkwardly—the footfalls of a simian that once ate the severed, barbecued head of a chicken—
The brains and the skull—all chewed up and crunching between the molars—
The gray smoke from the street vendor's makeshift gridiron rising like a poison

Jeff Gangwer

"Parked motorcycles like big red buttons..."

When I see them,
I often have strong urges to tip them over—
Parked motorcycles like big red buttons that read, "Do not push this button"—
But because I was raised to be civil and productive,
I only imagine the awesome sight and sound of tipping a motorcycle—
The shove, the fall, the crash—the superficial damage—the satisfaction of scratching the itch

Jeff Gangwer

"Remember me as a moment in time..."

Remember me as a moment in time...
...because I was never worthy of your love

Jeff Gangwer

"Sometimes—damn you—"

Sometimes—damn you—
I wish we could just switch places—
So you have the penis—I have the vagina—
And you know firsthand how heavy this cross feels—
You an' all that power in your pants—like a million dollars

Jeff Gangwer

"The eye crud, the sleepy dirt"

I love her more than anything—
Even when I wake to find her hogging the sheets—
The nightly draft sweeping over my naked legs and feet—
And damn it, this isn't the first time that
I woke to nothing but the mattress

I roll to and pull some for my own,
All the while thinking how
I love her unequivocally—
Despite her many flaws—
Real or perceived—

Despite the rheum that gathers—
The eye crud, the sleepy dirt,
The mucopurulent discharge—
The reason I live and breathe
And work to pay the mortgage

And, reclaiming the few,
I wonder if she's dreaming about us—
The Gangwers, the newlyweds, the honeymooners—
Sunbathing on a Costa Rican beach
Or "using the room" at the resort....

I'll ask her about it tomorrow,
During breakfast—
My waffles soaking up pancake syrup—
But I won't mention the sheets she hogged last night—
Or the morning gunk in her eyes if she fails to dig it out

No, I'll simply treasure the moment—
And others like this one—and I'll think about
The rheum that gathers in God's Wife's eyes—
Her heavenly eyes, hazel and bright—
And I'll wonder if He's as lucky as I am....

Jeff Gangwer

"The goddamn language barrier..."

The goddamn language barrier
Birthed a cold silence in our home—
At the table, during breakfast,
Then in the car, on the way to the Home Depot,
And again in the aisles—surrounded by too many choices

Jeff Gangwer

"The Masterpiece"

This one—
This one right here—
This one right here...will be the one—
The work that I call..."The Masterpiece"....

The one that reveals every truth,
The one that breaks every convention—
The work that captures the heart of every reader—
The Masterpiece—

The poem that I wrote
When I was running through the wind—
The poem that I wrote...for good and for all—
"The Masterpiece" that my computer SWALLOWED WHOLE before I could save it

Jeff Gangwer

"These doodles help me..."

With a few well laid pen strokes,
I finish my latest cartoon:

It's you again,
Doing something unspeakable

But please don't be angry;
These doodles help me sit through church

Jeff Gangwer

"Too many abuses..."

I hurt you—
Too many times—
It's true—
But I was selfish and reckless—
And also hateful when we "made love"—
A strange perversity
That kept you caged in that cell—
The key holder spinning the key ring on his finger—
Too many abuses to list or chronicle—
And the truth,
Lost like semen on a wad of
Spent toilet tissue—
Crusting; crumpled up
And thrown
Away

Jeff Gangwer

"While passing through these portals..."

While passing through these portals,
I wonder how many others have journeyed here

I wonder who they were—
What they carried in their hands or in their arms—
And what they held in their hearts—and why they crossed these thresholds

Jeff Gangwer

"With burning lungs"

With burning lungs,
I ran under a vista of soaring,
Snowcapped mountains—as if Utah—
A goddess—raised them up for satisfaction

I saw the last of Wednesday's light
Scatter into a cloudbank in the west heavens
Where a thousand colors bled together—
Utah's colors—

Both warm and cold—
Like airbrushed acrylic,
Applied with expertise—
Just for me

I saw shades of red and yellow—
Colors that faded into orange and blue—
And then disappeared completely—
And I realized the sad futility of the poet's words—

The limitations of language—
The limitations of the word "red"—
The limitations of the word "orange"—
Colors that can't be described from roads or sidewalks—

The words inadequate—
Just symbols and sounds—
The runner struggling into the east—
The poet attempting to paint what can never be relived

Jeff Gangwer

13.7 Billion Years from Yesterday

Not one of us can truly imagine a universe of infinite monkeys
All attempting to type the complete works of Shakespeare—
And likewise, none can fathom the age of the universe,
Which, from quantum fluctuations and inflation,
Began 13.7 billion years from yesterday—
In the Big Bang Expansion—
From the development of stars, galaxies, and planets
To the accelerated increase of dark matter—and dark energy....

Jeff Gangwer

22,514 Digits of π

Somewhat quaint and articulate,
Daniel Tammet memorized and recited
22,514 digits of π from a mental landscape
Of colors, shapes, motions, and textures

I find, in this,
The very definition of harmony—
A man who could feel the intangible physicalities of numbers—
Almost like a hand floating and smoothing over the naturally hewn surface of stone

And stone, older than man—
Basalt, dense and black—
Andesite, granite, and rhyolite, all lighter in color—
But nothing darker, lighter, or even older than π

Jeff Gangwer

33

Even after my back hits the mattress for the night,
I clench my teeth through the darkness and continue writing—
An Idiot's Delight—ideas, like rogue envelope stuffers, jamming words into my head

Jeff Gangwer

A Beautiful Death

He kneels ceremoniously to the floor

He opens his kimono,
Exposing his abdomen

He lifts a tanto—
And with both hands gripped tightly around the handle...
...he plunges the tip of the blade deep into the left side of his belly—
Below the navel—
And forces the blade from the left to the right:

He groans profoundly and trembles uncontrollably

A single drop of blood falls to the floor

Then two drops;
Then three drops;
Then, continually

His face turns pale;
His head drops;
His eyes stare blankly into space:

"It's warmer here."

He pulls the tanto from his belly...
...and puts it back on the table

His whole body shudders spasmodically

Nothing prepared him for this:

His blood gushes forth

His bowels spill out onto the white cloth

His eyes close, then open...
...close, then open

Then...
...approaching death...
...his body stills

He gracefully slumps forward;
Then topples abruptly to his right
And crashes to the floor

He twitches...
...then stills

A mass of blood drains from his body,
Gradually soaking into the cloth while he fades...

...and dies

Jeff Gangwer

A Divine Humanity and "...every splendor"

In truth,
We are Members of a Divine Humanity—
A grand, intelligent Race of Men and Women—
Immortal Gods and Goddesses—
A Union, an Order, and a Cardinality—
All anointed to become Princes and Princesses—
All ordained to stand as Kings and Queens—the Nobles for Eternity

As Immortals,
We will eat, drink, and rest;
We will live and love—and even laugh—
And together as one,
Under our Grand Head, the Father of all—
The God who organized each from the dust of the earth—
We will work to build our celestial homes and communities—autonomously

And free to reign,
We will announce our royalty;
We will establish our exalted thrones;
And we will build our magnanimous Kingdoms—
And from Kingdoms...Worlds—
Worlds of infinite materials, resources, and wealth—
Light, power, creation, means—everlasting life in every splendor

Jeff Gangwer

A Drunken Buffoon

We watched
Oliver Stone's movie
and decided
that Jim Morrison
was nothing more than
a drunken buffoon
with just
enough
talent,
charisma,
and sex appeal
to catch lightning
in a bottle—
the Lizard King
who tripped on acid—
and followed
that Indian
through the desert—
only to emerge as Val Kilmer

Jeff Gangwer

A Grim Connection

I know that Causation—
The elusive b***h—
Isn't the same
As Correlation
Because, at present,
In this land o' chips an' salsa
An' sweet-scented pepperoni pizza—
Violent video games are as commonplace
As the seagulls that flap, fly, squawk, and s**t
Over the great landfills of our fathers—
Or as the tubes of toothpaste—
Crust at the plastic nozzle—
Stains on the porcelain sink—
And because their teeth,
However ugly or revolting,
Aren't rotting in their mouths
Or even falling out at an alarming rate,
I know that the kids who play these fantastic games—
The ones who feel more at home on otherworldly battlefields—
Aren't shooting and killing each other to an extent that we can make
A grim connection between the two
And I also know—
With reasonable certainty—
That televangelism and obesity are
Undeniably AND inseparably connected—
From fat asses to even fatter wallets—
From trailer park trash to multimillionaires—
Like the marriage of peanut butter and strawberry jam—
Two of the best possibilities for a sandwich that anyone could ever want

Jeff Gangwer

A History of Turpitude

When I cleaned President Kim Clark's carpet in the Kimball,
I would often steal small handfuls of Jelly Belly jelly beans—
Just enough to get me through the rest of my shift—
Petty thievery that continued elsewhere—
At the free sample tables at Costco,
At every hotel room that I ever slept in—
At every turn where somebody offered me a ballpoint pen—
Writing tools that usually slid into my pants pockets when I departed—
Now just a history of turpitude—collected and rubber-bound in a blue shoebox—
Pens and pens enough to write and re-write every line and stanza into the next ten years

Jeff Gangwer

A Mission, a Will…a Hope

In a foreign land,
A pilgrim from the west
Pushes his fingers into the earth

He does this with a mission, a will, and a hope

He works to draw out a small sample—
A piece of the Syrian Desert—
Another microcosm

Jeff Gangwer

A Real Circus

The last two weeks on campus are a real circus—
The students in a pre-summer conniption—
Pleas for independence—
Their lockers open ‘n' empty—
Garbage in the halls,
Gum under the tables—
Their yearbooks and pictures—
Glossy pages and outdated styles—
Smiles and tears,
Notes and signatures—
Their last days of fantasy—
The outside sun cooking the building—
The bricks warm to the touch—
The next season so close that they can already sense
The smells of barbecues, fireworks, and freshly cut grass—
Every sensation that gave man a reason to stand and walk upright

Jeff Gangwer

A Simple Ode to George Carlin

Square,
Hip,
Radical,
Nihilist

Cunning,
Cutting,
Brilliant,
Orator

Rude,
Crude,
Profane,
Illuminating genius

Uncle Carlin,
I hope to meet you someday—
Not at a urinal or on an elevator—
But in or at (or around) the Big Electron

Jeff Gangwer

A Small Measure of Integrity

If I could possess a small measure of Integrity—
Just enough that I could scoop it up with a butter knife
And spread it over the golden, crusty surface of my breakfast toast—

I would stand up in all the triumph of an
Armchair activist and walk away from the ills of Jealousy—
Without my failing heart and a neck heavy with an albatross of self-despair

For when I read the published compositions of other, more successful poets—
The ones who wrote with greater skill and deeper insight—
Their lines more lyrical, sacred and timeless—

Like "The Touch of the Master's Hand"—
I often feel like that battered, dust-covered violin at the auction—
A soulful instrument that, when fine-tuned, will sound like "a caroling angel"

And I hope that my carefully chosen words will LEAP UP from the screen
Like the flashing, fleeting sparks from the welder's work of metallic coalescence—
Blooming and vanishing in the instant before Mister Analysis can snag them—

And I often grumble to think how I deserve "my big break"—
The Big Break that every slothful American desires—
Even as the sun cooks their fatty excesses

Jeff Gangwer

A Stolen Kiss / "Buko"

I kissed Megan Senter on the lips—
But only because she said that I could kiss her on the cheek—
A stolen kiss like something from the French cinema—
A thin face, a round face—and a surprise to rival my first drink of coconut juice—
What the Filipinos call "buko"—milky, meaty—young and sweet

Jeff Gangwer

A Sudden Death

He works from his knees,
Picking pea pods in the warmth of the rising sun

Without warning, he falls to the soil
And suffers a massive heart attack:

"I didn't finish."

He struggles to fight the pain:

He rolls to his back,
Looks upward,
Clinches his teeth,
And stiffens

He dies—
A strange, albeit peaceful smile freezing into his twisted face

Jeff Gangwer

A Tiny Tornado

I'm leaving for the day
And on my way to the car,
I pass through a tiny tornado—
A spinning tantrum in the courtyard—
The little feller sending up dead sagebrush
And discards and rubbish from the student body

Jeff Gangwer

Abrupt Left Turns

I want
each poem
that I author,

whether it be
ridiculous or sublime,
beautiful or ugly,

to fall
and land
smack down

on the page,
so it can
twist

and
take
an abrupt

left turn
at its
end

Jeff Gangwer

Abundance and Scarcity

I saw two men on a Blu-ray Tuesday:

The first one lives a life of abundance

He was perceivably wealthy,
He was well nourished,
And he was walking with a head held high

I watched him stroll freely from the Temple—
From a beautiful edifice of granite hewn by the Saints—
From a session where he worked for the salvation of the departed

He walked past the gates and past the flowers
And beyond the temple grounds where
He passed the second one:

He was desolate,
He was malnourished,
And he was standing with a sign and begging for change

He lives a life of scarcity

Jeff Gangwer

Admiration for the Atheist

I have nothing but admiration for the atheist
Who feigns to worship the Flying Spaghetti Monster

Jeff Gangwer

Advancing the Wheel Lines

Before I was ten, my grandpa would place me
On the back of his red Honda motorcycle—

Or on the "sickle, " as he called it—
And then he'd tell me to "Hang on"

He'd stomp on the kick start
And the sickle would ratchet to life

Together, we'd ride out at dusk into
The green, summer-fed alfalfa fields

I'd watch him at work while he
Advanced the wheeled irrigation lines

He'd work the hoses and the valves
And water would shoot into his face

He'd hop back onto the sickle
And we'd tear off into another field

As always, the sun would disappear,
But he'd ride into the blackness without fear

The white light beam from the headlamp would reveal
Just enough so I knew that our path wasn't impossible

We'd fly faster than anything that I could imagine
And the cold air would whip through my long blonde hair

And I'd keep my little arms wrapped around my grandpa's massive belly

Jeff Gangwer

Ambulatus

Ambulatus—
Walking upright—
Propulsion from the limbs—
The gait from generations—thousands; ghosts—
A miracle more common—yet more profound—than water into wine

Jeff Gangwer

America

Oh, yeah

Here we go:

My favorite word—
My favorite idea

The Promised Land—
Old Glory waving in the wind

A square of flaccid yellow artifice
Melting atop a slice of warm apple pie

Fifty states of dog s**t and Wal-Mart stores—
Mac' 'n' cheese an' anal rape—
Slaves and satellites

Electric mobility scooters—
Sport utility vehicles—
Diet soda pops

I saw these and realized that
We are drowning—hopelessly clawing upward for air,
Slowly digesting in the belly of god's enormous, horrible beast….

And the beast is squatting with pain—
Sick in its digestion—
Defecating without control—and bleeding to death....

Jeff Gangwer

An Ugly Death

He places the barrel of his Glock 27 into his quivering mouth:

He hesitates—
His survival instinct in full effect

His last thought:

"I should have listened."

He squeezes the trigger—
And his brain matter splatters across the interior of his brand-new Acura R.L.X.

Jeff Gangwer

Another Bestseller

Todd Burpo wrote a book
And sold his integrity for millions of dollars—
And I laughed when I pictured White Jesus
Sitting atop a rainbow-colored pony—
Another bestseller

Jeff Gangwer

Another Home

I found another home—
With smooth, tiled floors—
Grains of sand sticking to my soles—
Gallo pinto on the stove,
Warm water from the spout,
Electrical power from the plugs—
Just enough—thank goodness—to find contentment

Jeff Gangwer

Another Superkiss

I don't mind admitting
That I love the sweet chemical smell of gasoline—
Or the bitter taste of Imperial on your breath during another superkiss—
Love in all of its finery—but warm and sticky—
This one near the beach at Puntarenas—near the Pacific Ocean—
Another while our honeymoon commences

Jeff Gangwer

At Your Best

At your best,
You are patient and loving;
You are kind and considerate;
You strive for happiness and harmony

At your best,
You stroke the hairs of my head;
You offer your arms for a hug;
You kiss me without restraint

You listen,
You smile,
You accept me

You question and challenge me;
You tell me how you're feeling;
You include me in your life

You prove again and again that you're a worthy friend

Jeff Gangwer

At Your Worst

At your worst,
You are impatient and hateful;
You are mean and inconsiderate;
You strive for nothing but selfishness

You disappoint me;
You offer nothing;
You piss me off

You pull away;
You cry

In the end, I was happy to leave you

Jeff Gangwer

Beautiful Lies / Ugly Truths

We live in a world of fierce and negligible denials—
A world where we drink up beautiful lies, rather than ugly truths—
The man in the yellow jersey appearing like a blur when he passes with the others

Jeff Gangwer

Blooming Tulips

After a turn in the weather,
The tulips start to bloom—

Some from their street-facing garages—
Cold beer cans in their hands—

Rock ‘n' roll from buzzing boom boxes—
Led Zeppelin's "Black Dog" and Badfinger's "Baby Blue"

And others into their yards—
Mowing and then sweeping up the grass clippings

And a thirty-something, loading a kayak onto his ‘94 Jeep
And a forty-something, blasting out on his black Harley—

The awful jackass, I thought—
Potato, potato, potato—

And from these, I bend back toward the house—
Back to the humming of my laptop—and back to a blank Word document

Jeff Gangwer

Christopher Robin, Former Child Star

My! what a famous little boy:
Christopher Robin—
No longer a friend or a child star—
No longer the treasure of yesteryears:

Rather...he's an old burnout in his late 80s

He doesn't live at home with his parents anymore;
He lives in a cardboard box—
Somewhere deep in Ashdown Forest in East Sussex, England

His "experiences" in the Hundred Acre Wood with his still-talking animal friends are really just mental delusions caused by years of drug use

In reality,
Christopher bums cigarettes,
Panhandles for change,
Drinks the hard stuff,
Collects aluminum,
Pushes a grocery cart,
Sleeps on park benches,
And frequently talks to his motley assemblage of
Inanimate stuffed animals, Winnie-the-Pooh, Piglet, and Tigger—
The only toys that weren't ripped and ground to pieces in the so-called "garbage disposal incident"

And from time to time,
Christopher still squeezes into those boyish shorts—
Now stained with ketchup and relish—
Remnants from a dozen hotdog treats—
But only when the weather permits—
But they don't fit so well—
And the locals are aghast
When they spot his flabby, hairy thighs—
Proof that dreams that come true are only true in the moment—
That success is terribly transitory—
An unsightly reminder that all of us will age...and die

Christopher Robin, former child star—
The defeated bitch's bastard—
An imaginary character I think about whenever I see him on the streets

Jeff Gangwer

Collapse / Rebirth

When a
star burns
to its
collapse,
a black hole
becomes
the new
paradigm—
a space-time
occupation of
infinite density
and gravitational
singularity in
which all
matter—
and all
light,
whether it
be a
wave or
a particle—
is drawn
inward into
its final
destruction
and
rebirth

Jeff Gangwer

Color, Cracks, and Concrete

After our plane touches down at the airport in San Jose,
I discover that Costa Rica is a land of color, cracks, and concrete

Orange and blue—
And red—like the lips of Dracula—

In every banner, advertisement, and piece of graffiti—
And green in every leaf and tree

Color,
Cracks and concrete

Jeff Gangwer

Communion and Corned Beef

I stumble into the kitchen at 7: 30 in the morning
In order to prepare our Sunday dinner

I slice and chop four potatoes
And dump the pieces into the Crock Pot

I place a brisket of corned beef and its juices onto the potatoes
And fill the vessel with water until it brims

I turn the dial to High and the contents cook for an hour,
Then I turn it to Low and all but forget about it

At 9: 45, fifteen minutes before church,
We stand in the kitchen and read from The New Testament:

First Corinthians, chapter eleven, verses twenty-four to twenty-six—
The Apostle Paul on the sacramental emblems of the Lord's Last Supper

After reading, I break the bread from a cold dinner roll
And we chew and swallow the Body of our Savior

We drink some grape juice from the shot glasses that Linda gave me—
The Blood that was shed for the remission of our sins

Ten hours later, back at the dinner table, I cut into the pink of the meat—
The salted sustenance for the damned and for the righteous

Jeff Gangwer

Constancy

At night,
the snow fell
in a constancy
of flakes
that whitened
everything
in sight

And diffused,
the lights
of the city
lit everything
before
my bright,
blue eyes

And I imagined
that one could
stand outside
in the snow
and read
from the text of a book
and imagine anything

After the snowfall, I could see for miles

I had never seen such brightness at ten o’clock

Jeff Gangwer

Consulting the Bones

I'm a serious, thoughtful educator

I'm also proficient and certified

I earned a degree,
An endorsement,
Another endorsement,
And a license—

And then another license—
A Level 2 "Professional Educator License"
Issued by the great state of Utah—
The Beehive State—

As if a few years on the job weren't good enough—
The notion that we should "always be learning, always be advancing"—
The Days and Weeks and Months of experience turning
And patting me on the back—

"Atta boy, Jeffrey"—

"Keep up the good work, son"—

But sometimes,
When we're unable to make a classroom decision—
The problem too overwhelming—
The answer nowhere in sight...

...my students and I consult the bones

Yep, you read that correctly: we consult the bones

I open one of my desk drawers and remove a double handful of dried chicken bones—
And then I cast them ceremoniously onto the nearest table
Where they fall and scatter, clicking and clacking...
...and I tell my students what they "say"....

They laugh because they never suspected that a grown man with a degree and a license would ever decide their fate with voodoo bones

Jeff Gangwer

Copacetic Sounds

When the words fall properly
And the lines take flight—
Like birds from nests—
I feel like Joe Starrett must've felt—
The brawny Irish homesteader from Shane—
The man who pushed and conquered the colossal tree stump
With Shane at his side—the kind, reforming gunslinger—
In a scene that captures the Spirit of American Perseverance
Where Victor Young's orchestra swells in triumph—in copacetic sounds....

Jeff Gangwer

Crisps

Later,
I pulled
eighty feet of
the garden hose
out to
the mailbox
and watered
the five struggling petunias
that withered
to crisps
in the hot,
summer sun

Jeff Gangwer

Days and Games

I remember days and games in the city—
Kick the Can and Capture the Flag—
Peddling fiercely from Nevin's house;
Blasting through stop signs
And onto open city streets

We spent those days wheeling off the loading dock at the Post Office,
"Catching air" under bargain-basement B.M.X. wonders—
Landing and cussing like John McClane—
Tires, wheels, frames, and bones—
Concrete's lesson for the boys

We slept in the Shook's backyard—
Up in the tree house where the mosquitoes bit Nigel—
Awake with muddy buddies and Mag-Lites;
Powwows on boobs and rock music—
Sleeping bags swishing,
Boys laughing

As Boy Scouts of America, we went camping and hiking—
The cocoa-fueled deacon-pirates of Troop 59—
Lifting crocked sabers from the fire pits—
With our knives at the ready—
All on the trail to Eagle

We spent those splendid days as gamers—
Hide the Belt and Battle of the Bulge—
Duke Nukem on the computer—
GoldenEye on the N64—
Paintballs soaring—green, red, and yellow—splat, splat, splat

Jeff Gangwer

Decisions, Decisions

Decisions, decisions....

"Choices"...or "options"...?

"Joy"...or "pleasure"...?

"Delight"...or "elation"...?

"Enjoyment"...or "happiness"...?

"Sadness"...or "misery"...?

"Airship"...or "dirigible"...?

"Word"...or "vocable"...?

"Gender"...or "sex"...?

"Sex"...or "lovemaking"...?

"Synonym"...or "metonym"...?

"Analogue"...or "equivalent"...?

"Decisions"...or "conclusions"...?

Decisions...and conclusions....

Jeff Gangwer

Developing the Curriculum / Sexy Words

On a warm, beautiful Thursday in April,
A smattering of English Educators met together
In an oblong conference room at the District Office
For the all-important purpose of "developing the curriculum"—
The types who relish the opportunity to use words like
"Smattering" and "development" and "curriculum"
And other such buzzwords and exhortations—
And while I'm "zoning out" and
Scribbling lines onto a page,
Deciding where and
When they should break—
And whether or not the first words of
each line should be capitalized like the others—
They turn to me, the youngest, skinniest pedagogue of the modicum,
and ask for my input—my "contribution" to the proceedings in a "collaboration"
that I neither wanted nor agreed to be a party to—but honestly, I'm elsewhere—
Altogether lost in a mind-place where the audacious search for
truth brings me to the locales of romance and love—
And copulation—
Not because I'm special or unique,
but because every poet is a love-crazed pervert,
always thinking about sex, sex, and sex—
And sexy sex—
The only reason
that any of ‘em sit down
and scribble out
anything
at all:
Sex—
And sexy words—
The best way to maintain
my very limited
attention

Jeff Gangwer

Digging with Sergei

I worked with a Russian boy who couldn't use a shovel

Err—
Well—
He could use it—
He could...hold it—
In his hands—
In these clumsy, slithering, Siberian meat hooks—
But when we arrived to dig,
He didn't hold it—in his hands....

Instead,
(And this pains me)
He stood at the site with me
And worked the shovel with one hand—
With one hand—
The other dangling uselessly at his side—
The way Borat might work a shovel if he was a Russian
(And not a Kazakh)

And I remember saying to him,
With the chuckle of experience,
'You can't use a shovel like that
'With one hand, Serge'
(And he hated me whenever I called him that)
'That won't work, man;
'You need to use both hands—
'Both hands! '

And to my surprise,
He argued with me—quite fiercely—
In that thick, cross-tongued, laugh-inducing accent that we've all heard—
The way the Russians sound when they're ending the world—
Commie villains with their fingers on big red buttons—
Nuclear explosive devices—! —
But then I out dug him—
Ten spadefuls to one

Lesson here: if you have two hands...use both—
Especially when digging for minimum wage—
Not for the hammer or the sickle

Jeff Gangwer

Door-to-Door Selling

When I last saw
the coolest guy
from my high school,
he was door-to-door selling
with a power drill
and a drill bit
and he was offering to bore
peepholes into people's front doors

I guess you could say that
all that popularity,
beer drinking,
and football
finally paid off
for him

Jeff Gangwer

Doorways / Points of Access

The best poems
have doorways—

And doors
that swing—

Hinges and knobs;
stiles, rails, and panels—

Points of access
for readers to open and explore

Jeff Gangwer

Dylan Bales

Dylan Bales wears a tie-dye hoodie
And these oversized Osiris brand skate shoes
And he walks into my classroom like a young Jim Carrey—
His long shoelaces dragging after him—
And with a goofy smile of crocked teeth,
He asks about the day's lesson—always eager to learn and struggle

Jeff Gangwer

Edit, Revise, Redact, and Correct

edit,
revise,
redact, and
correct—

right it,
write it,
re-write it, and
re-right it again—

I begin at the top;
At the top with the e—
Then move to the r, to the r,
And then to the c—

Edit,
Revise,
Redact, and
Correct—

Those
First
Several
Words now sounding correct

I right it and
Re-write it and
Move on to the Next—
Over and over to perfect the text

Jeff Gangwer

Eight Stones

I ran over the rocky beach at Playa Tambor where
My Wife and I would later read our Marriage Vows to each other
While the water—suds and salt—kissed our shoes—
And later, with the sun at our backs, we tossed eight stones into the surf—
Two for friendship, two for love, two for companionship, and two for commitment

Jeff Gangwer

Every Day / Cathartic Shots

Every day,
A life is changed—or ruined irrevocably

Somebody, somewhere,
Destroys another person—without restraint—

A man is killed, a woman is raped—
A child dies on a street—his ball rolling into the gutter

And every day, where the walls are closing in,
A poet takes up his pen—or sits at the keys in front of him—

The world's problems now centered in his crosshairs—
The poet taking aim and squeezing the trigger—cathartic shots onto the page

Jeff Gangwer

Everybody Stinks

Everybody stinks sometimes—
It's not just you

Jeff Gangwer

Everything I Write is St**

Everything I write is s**t

And such is the poet's plight—
Tap, tap, tapping—
Keys into letters,
Letters into words,
Words into lines,
And lines into despondence—
Hopeless, pathetic lines of lyrical s**t—
With eyeballs burning
And contacts gelling—
And fingers rubbing

And all to the poetry

And all to the poetry?

I smash the backspace bar
And delete everything—
Every line,
Every word,
Every letter—
Everything—
Back, back, backspacing—
Back before the poet's plight began—
Back to the blank page—
Back before the s**t

Yes, Virginia, everything I write...is s**t

Jeff Gangwer

Faith is a Friend

Faith is a friend

Faith is a cul-de-sac

Faith is anything but easy

Jeff Gangwer

Feeding the Calves

Twice a day—every day—
My grandma would walk down the road,
From the farm house to the calf barn,
And she'd feed the hungry Holstein calves

She showed me how to mix the milk formula—
A powder that always smelled malty and sweet—
And I would hold warm bottles for the newborns
And then pour grain and toss hay to the others

When age and a length of bone allowed,
I climbed into the pens and pushed the manure
Into a large collection tank under the barn—
A sight and smell to relish like any other rite of passage

Jeff Gangwer

Festivus Celebrations in Room 7

In my first year,
I held fast to my silly Festivus Pole—
Not a Rod of Iron,
But a nondenominational Festivus Pole—
Like the one Frank Costanza held in 'The Strike'—
And I stood at the head of my classroom—
With a feigned scowl on my face—
And aired my grievances—
To each and all

Most of my students laughed,
But poor Mollie Ditty cried because
I told her that I didn't like her head of curls

I was being facetious—
A word they didn't know—
But time will heal her wounds....

During The Feats of Strength,
My favorite student,
Jaden Fordham—
The one I called 'Red Wolf'—
This lovely little White trash girl that wrote so well—
Defeated every arm wrestler that stood up to challenge her

Imagine that: a beautiful, complicated young poet—
With bright blonde hair and a 'f**k the world' attitude,
Pinning football jocks and would-be gangsters against the tables....

In my second year,
Our Festivus was equally wonderful...
...but Fordham's equal never rose up to the occasion

Jeff Gangwer

Finding Solace in Something Stupid

Most of us find solace in something stupid

It's sad...but true

Christmas, for example, is quite stupid—
Very stupid—
Fun
But stupid—
Especially when we consider its history—
Its lack of Christian origin—
Not to mention the waste and the extravagance—
The lights, the presents, the doohickeys—
The celebration of Jesus Christ—
His birth in a manger—
Or in a cave somewhere
As others have speculated—
In the wrong month, I might add—
December—? ! —
And the fact that it's not really a holi-day—
More like a holi-month—
Where Wal-Mart is filled to the bricks with
Small populations of stupidity—
Trains of people finding solace—
One discount at a time

And I join them;
I join the Christians in their stupidity—
Warm and well on December 25—
Sitting in the comfort of my pajamas and Santa hat

In fact, I join the Christians gladly in their yuletide stupidity—
Like the people who slobber and sign the papers to appear on reality T.V.—
The greatest wasteland for solace and stupidity—
Willing to appear fifteen pounds heavier for their fifteen minutes for fame

And I join them gladly—
With a fool's heart—
Like a dog after bacon—
So I can find solace in something stupid

Because maybe stupidity in the form of solace can help us

And others find solace elsewhere—
Like Forrest Gump—
A fictitious character—
I know, I know—
But a character that I like—
One who finds solace in love—
And in running—
From coast to coast—
Love that lifts,
Love that builds,

Love that rubs feet,
Love that conquers mental shortcomings—
And Forrest said it best,
Toward the end of the movie,
After Jenny rejects his marriage proposal,
'I'm not a smart man...but I know what love is.'
Oh, and lest we forget,
Forrest also said,
'Stupid is as stupid does.'
And wasn't—no, isn't—THAT the truth?

And it's a truth that reminds me that Lee Harvey Oswald—
Which most people pronounce 'Oz-walt'—
As if the name contained a Z in the middle
And a T on the end—
Was NOT a patsy in
Some grand scheme to
Assassinate John F. Kennedy—
Who died in Dallas, Texas back on November 22,1963—
And that there was NO conspiracy
Involving the C.I.A.,
The F.B.I., L.B.J. or
The Mob or the Cubans
Or any other group of people or peoples—
Regardless of Oliver Stone's very well photographed—
And very well edited—
1991 masterpiece—
And yes, I agree,
Conspiracies are fun—
Like love or Christmas—
But ultimately, most of us find solace in something stupid

Jeff Gangwer

Four Corners

With time to spare, I allow my students to play a game called Four Corners

We laughed like bastards when the fat, stinky kid asked me if he could remove his winter boots for added stealth

Jeff Gangwer

Four Nails

They drove four nails
Into His hands—

Two through His wrists
And two more through His palms—

All that we might repent—and suffer not

Jeff Gangwer

Freedom, Joy, and Ice Cream

Am I getting older
now that yard work
feels more like freedom
than captivity—
more like joy
than drudgery—
more like ice cream
than asparagus?

Jeff Gangwer

From Tinseltown to YouTube

We love to watch the pretty people of Tinseltown—
Especially when speedballs cut them down
So we can post documentaries
And bicker on YouTube

Jeff Gangwer

Gods and Galaxies

I wish to be a man of the gods
And a man of the galaxies—
A man of resonate faith
And a man of secular understanding—
A man roving along the terrain—
With the vegetation—
Clear-headed—
With every faculty—
Looking on from a limited vantage—
My feet tamping over the grass and clover—
Always accepting the words of Socrates and Jesus—
And seeing the two possibilities—
Philosophy and Spirituality,
Thought and Piety—
As lovely, good-natured Friends—
Two synchronous Boys on a flight for sweets

Jeff Gangwer

Grey Thursday

Grey Thursday—
Not quite Black Friday

We ate,
Then moved;
We shopped,
Then moved

Best Buy,
Wal-Mart,
Macy's,
Zephora,
JC Penny

Blu-ray Discs—
Finding Nemo,
Pacific Rim,
House of Cards,
The Usual Suspects,
Donnie Darko,
Act of Valor

Pajamas,
Superman,
Spider-Man,
Black boots,
An RC truck,
A headless Dark Knight,
Make-up,
Panties,
Boxers,
A black wool suit jacket—
Black wool pants to match

Door busters, price cuts;
Lines, lines, lines

We ate,
Then moved;
We shopped and moved—
On to Our First Christmas

Jeff Gangwer

Happiness / Joy

Happiness—
The lips curling up—

Its transcendence: joy—
Black hair falling onto gold shoulders—

Two pleasures born from within—
In hearts that ache—

In hearts that seek conversion

Jeff Gangwer

He Sought His Father's Will

He strode through the city gate,
Crossed the ravine of Cedron,
And at a stone's casting,
Fell to His face—
The Lord of lords,
The King of kings,
Bowing down in humility—
The Lamb of God, the Last Sacrifice,
Offering Himself up to save a ruined world—
His blood oozing out from the pores of His skin

He sought His Father's will
And He drained the bitter cup—
Even the dregs—
And then He moved on—
On to His trial,
On to His cross,
On to His reward

Jeff Gangwer

He Travels

The world was larger
And when you're young and growing
And the world is nothing more than your own backyard,
Your father—
Gruff, but loving—
Is a man of fields and farms and dirt—
Or soil (as he would say)

And then the world grew

And distance began to divide

But now,
As we live and long,
We grow closer

We grow closer

He travels

He travels and he knows the world,
Learning whatever the world teaches him

And in traveling,
He would say,
"All are dependent on fields of green."

Fields of green

I like that

The backyard,
The field,
The farm,
The dirt

My world is larger still

Jeff Gangwer

Hip Hop

From the park
to the street,
hip hop
was a beat

From the mix
to the scratch,
hip hop
was an art

From the mind
to the mic',
hip hop
was a ‘piece

Wu-Tang,
Guru,
2pac,
Nas

These were masters
when hip hop was

Jeff Gangwer

Hopelessness

Hopelessness—
That desperate feeling in your jaw—
In the thick of your teeth—
At the edge of reason—
The fear that your prayers can never be answered

Hopelessness is universal

Jeff Gangwer

Hot Pocket Holes

My patience evaporates after a long day of incessant mediocrity
And I raise my voice in an old man's bitter frustration:

"SHUT YOUR DAD-GUM HOT POCKET HOLES! "

But everyone just laughs and doubles over—
Including the young pedagogue at the front of the class—
A toothpaste stain on his light blue necktie—
The dimples deepening in his smiling/sneering stinkface

Jeff Gangwer

I Died

I died...
...but I didn't hie to the heavens and meet you—
And I didn't fly or sail like they said I would....

I died...
...and met nothing but death—
A condition without feeling, an estate without sense....

Jeff Gangwer

I Grew Up Watching Ed O'Neill

I grew up watching Ed O'Neill,
But I only knew him as Al Bundy—
One of the most remarkably unremarkable protagonists
In the sordid history of Fox television sitcoms:
A husband, a father, a shoe salesman—
A guy with green in his teeth and sand in his wallet

Strangely, however, he never lost any of that;
He never lost Peg, Bud, Kelly, his shoe store occupation—or his legend:
He once scored four touchdowns in a single game for
The Polk High Panthers in the 1966 City Championship

In America, we root for the beer-drinking, nipple-loving losers—
The loudmouths who complain about their hunger pangs—
And we celebrate when they lose nothing—
Even if Reality would say otherwise

Al Bundy was like that

Jeff Gangwer

I Hate Her Curls the Most

What will I do with all my hatreds?

Or what should I do?

Or what can I do?

Anything?

I hate almost everything about her—
No—everything—not "almost"

Everything

Everything...
...but I hate her curls the most

And I hate those springtime colors—
They're intoxicating

And I hate that voice

It sounds sweeter—
And more charming—
Than anything else I've ever heard

I'm only cold ‘cause I can't....

Maybe I'll send a text message....

Maybe I'll just watch Ridley Scott's Alien...
...or Aliens...
...or Predators....

No...Predator

Dutch and the gang always seem to cheer me up—
Even though most of them die violently—
One by one in the jungle....

Jeff Gangwer

I Hate Love

I hate love

It enslaves me

It keeps me from vice

Jeff Gangwer

I Knew

I knew—
As John the Beloved knew,
Standing near the Man at Calvary—
That I would grow to love every bit of you—
With those first few strokes of your fingers through my hair

I knew—
With every other insanity—
That we would grow to love one another—
From every moment of kindness—because you're worth it—
My fingers moving slowly and gently through your silky black hair

Jeff Gangwer

I Love the Seventh Grade

I love the seventh grade;
Instead of whipping the horses,
I'm holding the reigns back

They laugh without restraint—
Excited about nothing—
Points that are ultimately meaningless—
Overjoyed to earn something without material worth

If only their joy continued—
From year to year,
From junior high...to high school,
And from high school...to wherever the hell they end up—
Before the boys discover the pleasures of sex without commitment,
Before the girls gain weight and notice how ugly they are when they look in the mirror,
And before they all learn how truly insignificant they are in the big bad world

I tell them that they're capable of anything
And that they're handsome and beautiful:
'Don't sell yourself short.
'Be bold; be daring; be strong.
'You can become what you will.'

I teach them the value of self-worth—
Not to be confused with self-esteem:
'You're not worthless.
'And don't let anyone tell you that you are.
'Each of you is worth something to someone.'

And I hope that I'm not lying to them;
I hope that somebody, somewhere, values them

If not, I hope that they gain the good sense to find someone who will

Jeff Gangwer

I Love You—

I love you—
Even when you use my hairbrush
And I have to use your hairbrush to remove your hair from the teeth in mine

Jeff Gangwer

I Put a Rose in Her Hand

I put a rose in her hand—
A Crimson Blush—

One of Nature's many ironies,
Severed for a gift—

Its long stem of disagreeable thorns—
Its head of twirling, regal petals—

Symbols of our exquisite love—
Anything and everything—

But just enough for my Queen—
For today, on the Fourteenth of February

Jeff Gangwer

I Should Have Thrown This Napkin Away

I'm scrawling these hurried words and wretched lines onto a nearby napkin while I wait for the girl with the red rash marks on her hands (and the gauges in her ears) to bring me the pastrami burger that I ordered....

I'm pushing the brass tip of this stolen pen roughly into these pulpy fibers while the black ink, almost like graffiti, spoils something white that was meant to wipe away the grease and ketchup from my face....

Okay

It's here

And it's Burger Time

Jeff Gangwer

I Toiled in the Vineyard of the Lord

I toiled in the vineyard of the Lord

I toiled with strength and in perseverance

I toiled with my fellow servants....

We called our work "a labor of love"

We dug about the trees

We trimmed the branches

We burned what was fruitless

We grafted branches in to the glory of the vineyard

We were diligent and ever watchful

We mastered our tasks

We rarely shirked

The Lord observed and upbraided not

He was well pleased

Together, in time, we will partake of the fruit....

Jeff Gangwer

I Write to You

I write to you from the arch in my back—
The bend in my frame,
A painful spot—
Good posture's enemy—

From the a** down below—
My legs aching,
My knees itching—
My flatulence ready for flight—

From the office at my school—
The custodians at work in the halls—
The floor polisher humming,
Their keys jangling—

From the house where I live—
The house to be a home—
From my broken Dell—
My crummy ol' computer from college—

From my Wife's new Gateway—
The laptop that she bought from Best Buy
So she could make contact with her mother in another country—
Two glorious women talking face-to-face on the Information Superhighway—

From a desktop at the public library in West Valley City—
A room of strangers and citizens that live and love like me—
A few million microbes subsisting on the keys in use—
From the A key, the space bar, the F key, the E key, the W key, et cetera—

I write to those who will find these words—
To those who will read them,
To those who will understand,
To those with boundless minds and romantic hearts

I write all, none excluded—
To the Bloods and to the Crips—
To the worshipers and the atheists—
To the men and women, the boys and girls

I write to you—and I write to you

Jeff Gangwer

I...Can Hardly Stand Her Beauty

I look and I see...
...and can hardly stand her beauty

It's a beauty—
And humanity—

That disparages most—
A beauty that frustrates me—

A beauty that moves me—
From here...

...to there—
Or anywhere I'm needed

It's a beauty to match the heart—
Warm and inviting

And even if (or when) it fades...
...my love will not

Jeff Gangwer

If Moments Were Endless

If moments were endless...
...you'd be with me right now

If moments were endless...
...we'd be together at that beach

If moments were endless...
...I'd be looking deep into your hazel eyes

If moments were endless...
...we'd be holding the hands as eternal companions

If moments were endless...
...you'd be standing behind me—our eyes on the blinking text cursor

Jeff Gangwer

Ignition on Three Brain Cells

I got nothin'—
Wrote this on fumes—
My brain igniting on three brain cells—
The ones that process my thoughts about sex—
The taste of her mouth—
Her chocolate breasts—whatever—
Or thoughts about food—
Wishing that cheese wasn't so fattening—
That red meat wasn't so dangerous—
And that a bag of potato chips wasn't my biggest weakness

Jeff Gangwer

In the Hours

In the hours of night,
With my body at rest,
I run from things fearful

Then I wake in a panic—
Feeling the rush—
Only to dismiss the nightmare

Jeff Gangwer

Inheritance

Inheritance:

The look we share—
That handsome, troublesome look

The fingers that punch the keys—
Working words into lines—and lines into stanzas

The books we like—
The Pilgrim's Progress and others that perplex and astound

The movement in our feet and in our legs—
That high that we feel in the long, painful miles that we run

That frightful temper—
Sending cellular telephones like missiles into gypsum walls

Jeff Gangwer

Intestinal Worms and Top Ramen Noodles

I look down at my little intestinal worms and wonder why the magic of colons and semicolons eludes them

The eyes staring back at me are those of the dead

Their skulls must be filled with the heaping, steaming clusters and knots of a hundred billion Top Ramen noodles

Jeff Gangwer

Jeff Junior

Jeff Junior is a Little Hose that allows me to urinate dangerously into an empty water bottle at seventy-five miles per hour while Tool's Lateralus roars sweetly through the plush, aftermarket stereo system in my Saturn—
The grinding, pounding sounds of altitude—treble and base—Maynard's voice like a latter-day prophet's lamentations; through the metal with an odd touch of honey:

"We'll ride the spiral to the end and
"May just go where no one's been...."

But in time, "Jeff Junior" might be a son of mine—my firstborn—the namesake—the fruit of my loins—"Heaven help us"—and decades from now, I pray that he's able to piss into a bottle at high speeds and destroy nothing—and kill no one—
Jus' like ‘is ol' man—Tool's music damaging another generation's eardrums—another Gangwer looking to "spiral out" and "keep going"....

Jeff Gangwer

Jesus Died

Jesus died...
...so I could finish this line

Jesus died...
...so the Relief Society could gossip on the Sabbath

Jesus died...
...so the Christian rockers could move and shake without drugs or sex

Jesus died...
...so I could drive and steer and turn in and out of the cul-de-sac—music bumpin'

Jeff Gangwer

Joseph Malins Was Right

Joseph Malins was right:
We should build a fence at the top of the cliff,
Rather than drive an ambulance down in the valley

I build the fence

Jeff Gangwer

Little by Little

"Little by little, " she says—
Three little words that become a motto—
The two of us, building a life together

"We need some furniture."
"Little by little, " she says—
Always kind, patient, and supportive

"We can't afford t' fix the car, Baby."
"Little by little, " she says—
Standing in the robes of domestic tranquility

"Ah, man. This carpet needs replaced."
"Little by little, " she says—
Working rice and broccoli into a cheesy casserole

"I wanna fix the house this summer."
"Little by little, " she says—
Mi Papita, mi Tortuguita—her hands in the sink

"I need tools for this job! I don't have any tools! "
"Little by little, " she says—
The two of us, working and growing as one

Jeff Gangwer

Little Orange Devils

My Wife enters the guest room
Where I'm hunched over my laptop computer
In my attempt to write something lengthy and profound
And she feeds me a hand of crunchy Cheddar Jalapeño Cheetos—
One knobby stick at a time—
And the little orange devils taste so good,
They have the power to inspire these words, these lines, and this poem—
Which isn't lengthy—and certainly not profound—but quaint in a way that turns
My writing about wives into something worth reading

Jeff Gangwer

Love Can

Love can wait

Love can give

Love can take

Love can last

Love can live

Love can long

Love can love

Jeff Gangwer

Man Boobs

Life sucks big, black gorilla d***s
When you're twelve years old
And you've somehow developed
These dangling targets that
The other boys call "man boobs"—
Especially when most of the girls at school
Are developing boobs of their own—
These captivating, itty-bitty wonders that
You can only dream about touching or tasting—
And when you're naked in the bathroom
And you're looking at these useless, awkward
Bulges that hang and flop from your hairless chest,
You begin to cuss your rotten parents
For every strand of their genetic garbage—
These cursed, f*****g protuberances, you think—
And life sucks a few more during every
Desperate, painful round of
Adolescent discomfort,
Juvenile mockery,
And outright, open-air humiliation—
All so you can build and re-build your character—
So you're somewhat prepared when you're
Topless at the local swimming pool
And the chill that hits you
Freezes your tits into
Stiff pepperonis—
So the flat-chested, jackassy beefcakes can
Start grabbing and squeezing your man-chesters
And roar with wicked laughter—
Which, of course, attracts the attention of
The horrid, pimple-faced girls who also join in the fun—
Not because their boobs are any bigger or any better,
But because yours are the same size as theirs—
And because they know that you want what they have—
And you're never gonna get ‘em

Jeff Gangwer

Meetings and Minds (and Mine)

My colleagues gather for meetings—
Faculty meetings—
"Professional Learning Community" meetings—
Meetings for glad-handing and discussions on this or that—
Meetings where Karlla calls out and Shanna opines to the contrary

Meetings of the minds—
And mine wandering....

Jeff Gangwer

Milking the Heifers

Sometimes—but always in the afternoon—
I'd hang out with Salvador, the hired man,
And I'd watch him milk the heifers in the milking parlor

I'd help him apply and remove the pulsating milk machines—
The assemblies of teacups, claws, and tubes—
And we'd talk about W.C.W. wrestlers like Rey Misterio, Jr.

I'd nod and smile and struggle to understand his broken English

Years later, I came home to see him in the hospital—
My friend who died too young

Jeff Gangwer

Misplaced Gifts

I felt the cold touch of rain hitting my face—
Misplaced gifts in the mid-July sunshine

I heard thunder cracking and a downpour let loose—
And the rain tickled my neck and drenched my shirt

I waited in the car in the parking lot
And listened to the raindrops land on the roof

I watched a family of five take refuge in their minivan—
Mostly girls—afraid to spoil their Sunday dresses

Jeff Gangwer

My Erector Set / The Electron Guns

At grandma's place on the farm,
I'd sit at the table and tinker with my Erector set—
With nuts and bolts, gears and girders, wheels and wires—
The best Christmas gift that any boy could ever receive

In the evening, after tinkering, I'd lie on the carpet in the living room
And watch The Wizard of Oz from a scratchy V.H.S. cassette tape—
The magic of Technicolor shining brightly from the worn-out electron guns
In my grandparents' console television—the ol' wooden cabinet cathode ray "boob tube"

Jeff Gangwer

My Face

My face
is a killing floor,
where whiskers and pimples
go to die

Jeff Gangwer

My So-Called "Quest" / "Bra Buddies" / The Taste of Blood

In my so-called "quest"
To educate and enculturate
The stammering, chowderheaded youth
That somehow wind their way into my classroom—
Their heads and feet sagging and dragging as if they just
Lost untold sums of money in a kiddy stock market catastrophe—
I project the works of the best—
The words and lines from the classics—
From Maya Angelou, who bores them for some strange reason—
To Robert Frost, who confuses them with his wordiness—
And to Walt Whitman, who makes them laugh because he sports a
Big, bushy beard in every picture that I show them—
And because he uses words like "breasts"—
Instead of "t**s" or "jugs" or "bra buddies"—
As if those would be any better when curtailing their
Laughter against the arts of yesteryears—
But when you're eleven, twelve, or even thirteen years of age,
Your brain—like a used tampon—functions like a bag o' wet hair—
And a poem—even if it be a work of pure genius—
Is only "gibberish" to you an' your fellows—
And my challenge for them to "write something better"
Is met with more rancor and indifference than the initial projection—
And my failures as the "enculturator extraordinaire"
Drive me back to my pad an' pencil—
The remedy for my frustrations—
The home of my catharses—
My jumping-off point—
From top to bottom—
From seed to stem—
From letters to words—
As if everything could be solved in the punching of the keys—
My A key worn to the point that the "A" itself has vanished from the keyboard—
Another testimony that the law of entropy—
Like the certainty of Death and Dirt—
Governs our world of headaches—
Like the two-day headache that I sustained
After Cody Hendrix laid two hundred pounds of fat and muscle
Into a haymaker that repositioned the preserves in my stupid, f****n' college face—
The same that left me with a taste of blood like the bitter pudding that
I ate from somewhere deep within the jungles of the Philippines....

Jeff Gangwer

Nihilism

It's Friday, man

Do you even care?

Embrace nihilism

Jeff Gangwer

Nobody Will Ever Read This

I was never truthful
When I sat in their small offices
And they asked me those "serious" questions—
But nobody will ever read this—
So they'll never know

Jeff Gangwer

O! To Be a Shark

O! To be a shark—
But not one o' those
Stupid-lookin' hammerheads—
But somethin' else—
Like maybe a tiger shark—
Or even a great white—
Always on the move—
Hunting—always hunting—
Usually for food—
But sometimes for shark poon—
Warm and wet—
And probably a little salty

Jeff Gangwer

Our Choices...Our Deaths

Our choices create this world

The world we know—
The choices we own

Our choices shape us

The shape we take—
The lives we live

And strange to think...
...our choices, good or bad,
Lead us all impartially to our deaths—
Not one excluding

We hope otherwise...
...and we hope in vein

We choose....

We die....

Jeff Gangwer

Our First Christmas

In Stansbury Park, at the bungalow:

With cured paint on the walls
And wrapped trinkets under a synthetic tree,
Rebeca and I celebrate the birth of Jesus:

"You're lookin' at one thousand light bulbs
"And forty-five feet of tinsel garlands, " I say

She smiles at the technicality of the décor—
The Surprise of the Year

In the morning,
We tear into gifts that I wrapped weeks ago
And Rebeca is gushing—
As if she reverted back to her more exciting,
More dangerous days as a young Tica—
Her dancin' days—
Her hip swayin' days—
Years before we met at the Café Zupas in West Valley

And I haven't seen her this animated before—
Except maybe when I took her dancing with Kim
And I had to SHOUT over the deafening sounds of
The electronica in order to proclaim,
"I LOVE YOU, BABY! "

The birth of Jesus tends to bring that out of us

And I like to belief that Jesus was a Dancer—
And that He was married to His Rebeca
And that they almost lived happily ever after....

At length,
We open everything that was given,
Including the big brown boxes that were shipped from the Coasts,
And then, happier than ever, we recline in the comfort of my black Naugahyde theater chairs while watching The Polar Express

She danced to the smash beats and the light flares of the reggaetoneros...
...but now she's mine....

Jeff Gangwer

Our First Thanksgiving

The line wraps around the Chuck-A-Rama.

Rebeca and I move to the rear.

We pass a disheartening mass of families.

The ladies look festive in their holiday sweaters.
The kids and adolescents whine and hunger.
The men of seniority stand in hats and mustaches.
They wait to pay and eat like royalty.

There's a girl near the front-middle—
A preening, posturing twenty-something
Who styles her flashy, dangling earrings.
Utah girls like to pretend they're from California.

Those who finish and quit the restaurant
Waddle to their cars or trucks or S.U.V.s.
They look heavy—
And even heavier after their meals.

I compliment and comfort Rebeca.

We hold hands and cuddle through the cold.

The weather is pleasant as we wait and wait and wait...and wait.

I wrap my arms around her shoulders.
She's so tiny in my clutches.
'This'll be worth it, ' I say.
She nods and agrees: 'I hope so, too.'

'For every hour that we wait out here,
'We'll eat and take up space in there, ' I say.
It's a good plan—
Despite the line.

The line bends to the right
And to the right again.
We look and see the line—
The front—'It's moving! '

I watch the rotund couple behind us:

They look hungry.

They look Republican.

'The line was longer last year, ' the wife says—
And her husband agrees: 'Yeah.'
He complains about working on a holiday.
Can you blame him?

'If they need me today, what choice do I have? '
'I don't think it's right, ' she ruminates.
Their stone-faced son simply ignores them—
Lost in his music.

Their trio looks fed—
But hungry—
But fed—
But certainly hungry.

The line bends through the front doors and switchbacks like a snake.

We pay and march through a crowd of buffet morticians.

An hour-plus later and we're finally sitting.

'Is a booth okay? '
'A booth is great.'
Who doesn't prefer booths to tables?
'Veronica will be your server.'

We ate turkey and ham and roast beef.
We ate cheesy macaroni 'n' cheese and mouthwatering turkey stuffing.
We drank apple bear and water—
And I drank some Mountain Dew.

As planned, we ate and we shared for an hour-plus.
The meal was worth the wait.
With seconds and thirds, the meal was worth the wait.
Then we quit and waddled our way into Grey Thursday.

Jeff Gangwer

Our Past

Our past....

The aggregate of conquest
And requisite blood
Spilt onto a soil that was once sacred

Our past....

The aggregate of bondage—
Chains and collars and whips—
All that enslaved and yoked God's children

Our past....

The expelling of peoples!
They were pushed—herded to the West!
Most died in the journey—cast out; extinct

Our past....

The aggregate of suffering—
Where the division ‘tween rich and poor
Proved liberty was but a farce

Our past....

A succession of liars and deceivers and sorcerers—
And a collection of unfortunates—
Those who lived and died so others could fatten

Our past is buried

Our future is history

Jeff Gangwer

Our Very Limited Time

I look
at you,
laughing
and
crying
in that
crusty
suit
that you
call
a body,
and think
about
our very
limited
time
on
this
plane
of
existence

Jeff Gangwer

Panhandling

Traffic—
Rush hour traffic

Cars and trucks and S.U.V.s—
And even one of those huge R.V.s—
All jammed up and fuming

The drivers grip the wheels;
Their feet hold to the pedals—
And we're all stuck—
Stuck where the heat and impatience brings misery

We're stuck at Wal-Mart

"Always low prices. Always."

"Save money. Live better."

Traffic....

Off to the side,
On a rough spread of grass,
We see and watch a man with a piece of cardboard in his hands

The sign reads,
"Homeless. Need Work."

His beard is thick, his shades are silver, and his cap is low

His hands and fingers are black

His visage is one of misery—
"Save money. Live better."

We're stuck at Wal-Mart...
...and we're trying to leave

And our car is loaded with goods and groceries

Panhandling....

Jeff Gangwer

Paradisiacal Ennoblement

Why is God willing to save my putrid soul?

What am I worth in the great plan—
The Plan of Redemption,
The Plan of Salvation—
My hope for eternal life—
That which was framed in mercy—
The Creator setting all into motion—
That which was set before man took his first breath?

What am I worth in this great plan—
To the God of the ancients—
The Man who condescended—
The Man who spoke with the prophets—
The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—
He who met with Moses to reveal the Law—
That which was prepared for the chosen of the Lord?

I pray to feel...know...and seek....

In the cold of night,
I bend and fall to my knees—
Alone in the hour of repentance—
Believing in and yearning for a bequest of forgiveness—
A seemingly impossible gift from the God of my salvation—
Calling out and crying to the Man of promise,
The Author of my being

I am evil,
I am rank,
I am undeserving of this salvation;
I am not worthy to ascend and meet Him,
I am not worthy to feel His loving embrace,
I am not worthy to stand in His glorious presence—
But nonetheless, I worship Him and trust in the hope for my redemption from the grave, my salvation from sin, and my exaltation in the world to come—

In the Celestial Consummation, a paradisiacal ennoblement worth more than the impermanent riches of a thousand lifetimes

Jeff Gangwer

Passing Churches

I often laugh a little
When passing churches—
Those enormous places of worship—
Where the servants of God collect money—
Not for the poor or for the needy,
But for the light bill—
For the clergymen—
Places where the answers
To life's innumerable problems are found
In a single text

And I think about the atonement and the resurrection of Jesus Christ—
Biblical events that surpass every other event in history for sheer impossibility—
Events that require the faith of mustard seeds

Jeff Gangwer

Paying the Bill

I'm talkin' t' the lunch ladies at school in the Cafetorium—
Which, by the way, is a portmanteau word for "cafeteria" and "auditorium"—
And they start laughing when I tell them about "paying the bill"—
Which is just a euphemism for "launching the flesh rocket"
Or "sinking the submarine" or "parking the porpoise"—
"Stuffin' the muffin" or "drivin' the hotdog bus into taco town"—
A little bit o' the ol' "Humpy Pumpty" or some "gland-to-gland combat"—
And we're all laughing now because the "rhythms of life" are oh-so rib-tickling
When you stop thinking about all the famine, draught, warfare, and AIDS in Africa—
What you don't see when you look out at your backyard through your sliding glass window
Here in the federal republic of the United States—
Even if you live in Mississippi, the poorest state in the Union—
Or in Baltimore, Maryland—where the events of H.B.O.'s The Wire take place—
With "Jimmy" McNulty and "Bunk" Moreland—Lester Freamon and "Kima" Greggs—
"Herc" and Carver—"Bubbles" and Omar—"Stringer" and "Bunny"—
Fictional characters from the Old Line State—"Little America"—
Where the Chincoteague ponies travel in great herds on Assateague Island—
Only to meet the saltwater cowboys who drive them off the beach and into the water—
A strange sight to behold—the equine beauties swimming awkwardly—
Their ochre necks and heads protruding from and bobbing through the slack tide

Jeff Gangwer

Penalty Shots

I always knew you were crazy...
...and watching you during the penalty shots only confirmed it

Jeff Gangwer

Pequeñas Fiestas

Democrats,
Republicans

Blue states,
Red states

Liberals,
Conservatives

Pro-choice,
Pro-life

Members of the mob,
Citizens of the Republic

A nation divided—
The oblivious of Nixonland

The same who guzzle beer and
Watch N.F.L. football on Monday nights

The same who devour chimichangas and
Blast their pequeñas fiestas onto their wives' chichis

Jeff Gangwer

Perfection

Perfection stood without sin—
A Prophet from Galilee—
The blameless One—
Righteousness; Virtue—
The complete Man

But before the days of His ministry and Passion,
Perfection worked as a carpenter—
A common woodworker—
A builder, an artisan—
His bronze tools at purpose:

An axe for chopping,
An adze for shaping—
A T-square, a level,
A plumb bob, a measuring tape,
A hammer, a mallet

A wedge, a chisel,
A knife, a saw,
A drill, a lathe,
A plane, a polisher,
A rasp, a sander—

Perfection at the bench,
Tooling and building—
The hands of the dust—
As dry as the Judean Desert—
Blood from the cuts and scrapes of labor

Perfection toiled; Perfection worked

Jeff Gangwer

Pioneers and Parade Floats

Brigham Young and the Mormon Pioneers rode
Out from the Midwest back in 1847—
Fourteen thousand of ‘em—in their teams and wagons

Theirs was a journey of one thousand, three hundred miles—
An arduous journey that seventy thousand
Completed over the next twenty years of progress

All that toil

One hundred and sixty-seven years later,
I stood with the Utahans on 200 East and we clapped
Our hands to the sight of a mechanical T. rex on a parade float

He was bigger and taller than anything else
And his green head swiveled
And his yellow jaw opened and closed

And he was "pushing forward" while "pulling" a handcart

Jeff Gangwer

Planets and Tennis Balls

Even the gods above are subject to the Laws of the Universe—
The same laws that govern the planets in their orbit—
And tennis balls sent aloft—
The neon warping and spinning

Jeff Gangwer

Poems without Homes

When I decide to keep these illegitimates,
I see them as unwanted puppies—
Still suckin' on the teats—
Whatever the hell that means—
If anything

Jeff Gangwer

Poetry Found Me

Poetry found me...

...like a child's hand digging into a jar,
The fingers mining for the right piece of candy—
The assorted pieces campaigning—
A rummage worth the wait—
And its weight

...from T-ball to hardball—
The pitcher winding,
The batter at war,
The fielders on swivels—
Pure, dusty, jubilant Americana

...from joysticks in motion
And controller buttons clicking—
Pixels and polygons—
The teenager's drug—
Jeff's favorite waste of time

...from adolescent humiliation—
A sticky discovery,
Warm and pathetic—
Every boy's denied secret—
The constant lure of recorded sex

...from the proving grounds—
A sun-speckled grassland, all for the taking—
The prowling of a boy in a Blaze-colored hunter's vest—
A pump-action Winchester,
Ready to buck

A ring-necked pheasant,
Up and flapping—
Like a cracking, instantaneous bolt of lightning—
And death from the smoothbore—and vapor in the air—
The game cut down from the sky

Poetry found me...

...from the Pearl of the Orient Seas—
Preaching door-to-door for the God of Peace—
Dressed in a white shirt, a necktie, and a name badge—
Walking by faith—and by sight—
Two in a unit

...from six-week seasons to proselyte hopefuls—
Youth and vigor and borrowed testimony—
Daily rejection and nightly prayers—
Dirt roads and tindahans—
The gift of tongues

...from Nevermind to In Utero—
From Illmatic to Stillmatic—
Music dependable—
Something to steady the angry heartbeat;
Something to blare from the electric windows of the ol' Buick

...from failed first dates galore—
The Katies and the Megans and thousands down the drain—
Enough bread to feed the ducks of Utah—
The Northern Pintails and the Cinnamon Teals—
The birds that glide across glassy waters—but paddle like hell underneath

...from the embrace of Acceptance,
Landing in the arms of a Girl no bigger than a corn nubbin—
And by God, she said 'Yes' when I asked her—
True, Central American grit—
The greatest success in this near-hopeless chronicle

...from Room 7—
My first classroom in the public school system—
My kingdom—my dinky domain—my asylum—
Just a minor, madcap contribution to society—
A small place for Poetry to walk in an' march up to the likes of Johnny and Susie an' punch ‘em both in the face

Jeff Gangwer

Porn Mags and Tabloid Television

I see the walking, talking results of
Porn mags and tabloid television,
Bad parenting and poor nutrition,
Sexual abuse and domestic violence

I see juggalos at the gas station,
In the convenience store—
Buyin' cigarettes with change—
Vomit on their clothes,
Metal in their faces,
Tattoos up their arms

I see ‘em at the Wal-Mart—
Pimpled and missing teeth,
Red-faced and strung-out—
Buyin' s**t they can't afford—
Pants saggin' off their a**es—
Crooked hats on their heads

I see society's rejects—
The scumbags and dirt-balls—
Human garbage, broken and scarred—
Clowns without a cause or a country—or even a circus

Jeff Gangwer

Pura Vida / Competing in the World Cup

Pure excitement; pura vida:

When the Costa Rica national football team is
Competing in the World Cup,
Nothing but the immediate Apocalypse—
Including the trumpets, horses, and beasts that John wrote about—
Can pull the Ticos away from their televisions or radios

I see them wild at their bars; waving flags in their streets—
My Wife and her mother—and the boys—
All on their feet for their National Anthem—
Their hands pressed to their hearts—
And later, those same hands, slapped to their heads in disappointment

But then—! —
Here we go again—
They shoot to their feet
When a Tico dribbles UP the field and ROCKETS the ball—! —
And their nation EXPLODES to the call of "¡GOOOOOOOOOOOOOL! "

Jeff Gangwer

Raking Leaves

Dust from
dancing clouds
stains my
mouth and nostrils
while I rake
these fallen leaves—
a thousand skeletons—
broken petioles,
empty veins,
dry blades—
yellow,
saffron,
and
brown

Then I spit

Jeff Gangwer

Ravings

Don't listen to my ravings—
My stupid thoughts without reason—
As if my head-machine were fueled on anger

Jeff Gangwer

Rebeca's Laugh

I know that life is good...
...when I hear Rebeca's laugh

It's a laugh that
Warms my soul,
Dispels my doubts,
And destroys my cynicisms—
A laugh that proves that God lives and breathes—
And that He loves me unconditionally

I find more than mere comfort in that laugh....

I find everything that I could ever want (or need) in that laugh....

That laugh...is my greatest success

Jeff Gangwer

Reconnoitering the Rim

I work with this big-haired b***h—
Who looks like a roadie on her knees,
Jackin' the c***s o' Mötley Crüe—
With 'meatballs' like Meatloaf's in Fight Club
And a smile like a grilled cheese sandwich—
Who labors intensely under the delusion that if
We reconnoiter the rim of all English Language Artistry,
We will magically find the Silver Bullet that we failed to find before—
The Missing Piece that will solve the problems of our American Education System....

Jeff Gangwer

Resolve / Purpose

Feet,
Under the covers

Hands,
Clasped in twain

Minds,
Together in resolve

Hearts,
Unified for purpose

Jeff Gangwer

Returns / Departures

I've noticed,
in travels of my own,
that seemingly,
my returns
are never as long—
and never as arduous—
as my departures—
what we might call
a strange inequality in traveling—
in coming and in going—
and in mine,
I've asked my fellows,
on planes
or on shuttles,
and to my delight,
I've learned
that most of them feel the same way—
that our returns are easier
than our departures

Jeff Gangwer

She Lost Them

Neckties—
More than anyone could wear in a lifetime—
And she lost them—
And she doesn't care that she lost them:
'They're just ties, ' she squeals

Ties, yes—but they're mine—
Well...they were mine....

She lost them

They're gone

Gone

F**k

S**t

Goddamn it all

'How could you lose a whole box-a neckties? ' I ask

She laughs coldly—
And carelessly

She doesn't care

'You could-a set all that other s**t on fire, ' I say

I'm suddenly channeling Bruce Willis' character from Pulp Fiction:

His girlfriend neglects to bring his gold watch, so he goes BALLISTIC

He even throws the hotel T.V. across the room into the wall

So he goes all the way back to his apartment to grab it...
...and then he kills Vincent Vega...
...but he finds his watch

Jeff Gangwer

Small Victories

I write many...

and proudly
pronounce

every line
saved...

a small victory—

every poem
written...

an insignificant
success—

I draw the stripes of small victories....

Jeff Gangwer

Something Lovely / "I took the piss out of it"

I was "in the zone" on a springtime run...
...when I wrote a poem about something lovely....

I hearkened to the voice of the Muse—
And she answered quite clearly—
In brilliant metaphors,
In euphonies,
In tropes—
And in all things poetic—
Her words sounding like music—
Her lines arranged like The Words of Love—

If such a book existed—

But later, at my desk,
with squinting eyes,
I began to think
and conclude
that everything
that I had written
was too obvious to call novel
or too "on the nose" to astonish—

So I pressed my favorite button of the bunch—
the one that obliterates the words that I simply regurgitated—

The button that casts "all things poetic" into the Hell of Nowhere—
until nothing was left but the words, "I took the piss out of it"—

And from this, I added,
"I am not a poet anymore"....

Jeff Gangwer

Son-of-a-B****g Bastards**

Son-of-a-b******g bastards—
Do they honestly not understand the simplicity—? —
And the magic—of colons and semicolons? !

Do they honestly fail to see it?

Do they? !

Son-of-a-b******g bastards....

Jeff Gangwer

Soup and Salt

The soup that you
prepared for our lunch
needed some salt,

so when I added
what I thought was a
diplomatic sprinkling,

I didn't expect you to
look at me as if my heart was
three minutes from seizure—

because you know that
I need to see the granules
in order to taste them

Jeff Gangwer

Stansbury Stars

I look up into a clear night sky
And thank God for the
Stansbury Stars

Stellar masses—
Brilliant spheres—
Plasma, glued with gravity

They are wondrous, untouchable

To fly and move with those stars must be God’s greatest adventure

Jeff Gangwer

Sugars and Plastics

When I was young an' still hooked on sugars and plastics,
I slobbered over The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
And The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers—
The latter because, episode after episode, they continued to save the planet
From the putty patrollers and the gang of hooligan monsters that
Rita Repulsa and Lord Zed kept sending down to earth—
Easy money for my super-cool, super-powered saviors from Angel Grove High School

Jeff Gangwer

Teaching is a Privilege

These eighth-grade students shot Silly String into my face during fifth period...
...and then they gave me an Olive Branch during first—
A medium-sized bag of Cheetos Puffs

I prefer the Crunchy

Still, teaching is a privilege

Jeff Gangwer

Ted Bundy's Mine

Ted Bundy's mine

Now, who's your favorite serial killer?

Jeff Gangwer

Ted Haggard

When I think of Christian ministers—
Especially the ones who live like the pharaohs of old—
I think of Ted Haggard, the evangelical millionaire from Indiana—
The megaminister who was caught buying crystal meth from a gay prostitute

Without a doubt,
Jesus died for my sins and transgressions—
And also Haggard's—
Ampin' on glass and slurpin' up the goo pipe

Jeff Gangwer

Ten Years Down the Road

In my twentieth year,
I departed for the mission field—
The San Pablo Philippines Mission—
And entered the most productive years of my youth

I served in Tayabas, Quezon, my first area;
Then in Santa Cruz, Marinduque—
Then in Torrijos of the same—
Six months on an island

At the halfway point,
I moved to San Pablo City, Laguna—
The noble city that bore our mission's name—
And I worked with a great sense of experience and maturity

Six months later, I served in Santa Rosa, also in Laguna;
And finally, in Lemery, Batangas—
Places that were (and are) dear to my heart—
Places I still think about—ten years down the road

Jeff Gangwer

Thank You, Bixby Snyder

"I'd buy that for a dollar! "

After years of depravity,
I still think that the foregoing is
The greatest line in cinematic history

And when people ask,
"What's wrong with you? "
(And they really wanna know)
I tell them that "I grew up on RoboCop—"
But then I have to specify—
"—the original, though, not the re-make."

I wonder when The Godfather re-make will be released....

Jeff Gangwer

The Assassination of Thomas Howard

Her husband rocked back and forth in his chair.
He nodded, smiled, and combed back his hair.
She worked merrily in her domestic activities;
She knew not his crimes, nor his violent proclivities.
They spoke not a word—their two children nearby,
Running and hiding—not yet knowing "goodbye."
She straightened her apron; he lit his cigar.
Husband and wife, admiring from afar.
Laughing in frolic, Jesse and Mary remained at play.
Thomas stood from his chair and looked with dismay:

A "friend" had arrived—cowardly and young;
However coy...he spoke with a lying tongue.
When the time was right, the deed was done:
The assassin shot Thomas with a nickel-plated gun.

Jeff Gangwer

The Atonement

All...was the Atonement—
The very condescension of God—
His birth, His youth, His time;
Every lesson learned,
Every lesson taught;
His suffering, His betrayal, His arrest,
His trials, His condemnation, His crucifixion;
His death, burial, and resurrection,
His ascension, His triumph, His glory—
His Atonement, His all

Jeff Gangwer

The Beauty of Bullst**

I love the beauty of bulls**t—
The gift of gab—

Foolish, insolent talk
While shootin' the s**t—

All the bulls**t
In its various forms:

Nonsense and
Balderdash

Hogwash and
Humbug

Flim-flam and
Fiddle-faddle

Bunk and
Baloney

Claptrap!

Poppy-cock!

Monkeyshine!

Malarkey!

Reasons to celebrate

Jeff Gangwer

The Boy in the Boots

He sprawls on the stairs of a stage,
Twisting in his boots—
The wears of a cowboy—red and burgundy

Unaware of his future,
He works the electronic device in his little hands—
A game, a creation, a world entire

In youth, he knows nothing but boots and games

Jeff Gangwer

The Boy in the Chair

Months later,
I saw the same boy—in the same boots,
Twisting away and pressing those buttons

I remember thinking,
Where will Time take him?
And what will he become...?

I smiled and felt at peace with the world

Jeff Gangwer

The Caricature Artist

I stood in the mall and watched the caricature artist—
An old, kindly man with glasses sliding down his nose

He sat on a folding chair and captured likenesses—
From genetic mishaps to illustrations worth hanging

For over an hour or so, I watched him at work—
Shoving tens and twenties into his neon fanny pack

He worked in the mediums of pencil and ink
And his jerky, silky hand was never at rest

And while drawing, his eyes darted continually
From image to subject and from subject to image

I watched him struggle to capture the likeness of
An ugly child who refused to smile or show her teeth

But in ten short minutes, he finished another—
And the little girl—bug-eyed and faintly smiling—

Waddled away with her family—
The freshly drawn caricature-portrait in her clutches—

The work of the caricature artist—
One page in a thousand (or maybe more)

Jeff Gangwer

The Cold Reminds Us

It's
cold
today

I
pinched
and held my
collar up against my face

I
used
a credit card
and chiseled the ice
from the glass of my car

The cold reminds us that we live to chisel

Jeff Gangwer

The Day Fife Bested the Brothers

The morning was quiet...
...but scrapes turn bloody.

Dale brought him in:
'Doc? '
'Yeah? '
'Jack was hit, by God.'
'Well, s**t, then: lay him down.'

The doc went to work, tools in hand.

Then, later that day,
Shortly after another scrape,
Dale brought the younger brother in:
'Doc? '
'Now what? '
'They got Johnny, too, by God. He's hit.'
'Jesus.'

The doc filled his hands and went back to work.

'What the hell's goin' on out there, Dale? '
'Jack said some'in' t' Fife—some'in' ‘bout ‘is brother—some'in' ‘bout lookin' good in a dress—so Jack sprung up on ‘im.'
'An' the brother? '
'Well, now, he trie' t' spring up on Fife in retaliation.'
'But Fife bested the brothers? '
'Yessir. That's right. Fife's good with a gun.'

The doc pulled bullets from Jack and John Daives that day.

He closed their grotesque voids with coarse stitches and advised them against speaking to Fife in the future.

'Avoid sour or contemptuous words, ' he said.

Simple wisdom.

Before the sun disappeared, he drank down some lemonade
And he sat rocking on his porch into the evening.

Jeff Gangwer

The Last Death

Have you ever thought about the last death—
The last death—
The last to finish the ride...?

Have you...?

Who will it be...?

Who will be...the last to die...?

The last death—
The last to draw air—
Only to swallow...and pass away

Who will it be...?

Who will be...the last to die...?

What will he say...?

What...will he say...?

Jeff Gangwer

The Little Blips of the Caret

I often
lose my mind
a little
when I forget
that I'm
staring into the
flat panel of
a liquid-crystal display
with tired eyes
that are
trained to
the little blips
of the blinking text cursor—
or the caret—
the vertical line
that appears
and
disappears—
an awful witness
that the
white space is
winning in
the Battle
of the
Blank
Page

Jeff Gangwer

The M********s**

These m**********s at the mall—
In this world of advertisements—
Plastics and superficialities—
Moving as if their lives weren't ending soon—
Breathing to live,
Living to buy,
Living to consume

These m**********s at the restaurant—
At the cash registers—
At the counter—
At the tables—
Fat and happy,
Slow and stupid—
What the boys in Dethklok might call, "Regular jack-offs"

These m**********s on television—
Grinning idiotically—
Giggling to deceive—
Modeling to feed their monkeys—
Jumping up onto Oprah Winfrey's couch—
Strutting tightly in the lights of a hundred flashbulbs
So a mindless gaggle of photographers can build their pointless portfolios

The m**********s playing golf—
The m**********s with money—
The m**********s in public office—
The m**********s sporting tattoos—
The m**********s I see while standing in line at Costco—
The objects of my White, silent rage—
While I wait to buy my Polish hotdog and sauerkraut

Jeff Gangwer

The Madness, the Preparations

The madness, the preparations—

The high-heeled footwear—

The platforms, the pumps, the sandals

The cosmetics—

The primers, the foundations, the concealers

The powders, the lipsticks, the plastics

The bronzers, the rouges, the mascaras

The dresses, the fabrics, the jewelry

The flowers, the stems, the petals

The centerpieces

The little candles and gemstones

The pictures, the paperwork—the anxiety

The consternation

Oh, and let's go through all o' this twice

For two wedding ceremonies

And two receptions

In two languages

Jeff Gangwer

The Master of The Cause

The boys at Les Schwab are fixing another tire when I hear the heart-stopping news:
"Hoffman was found dead in his Greenwich Village apartment..."

My first words are those of anger and disappointment:
"F**k you, heroin, you awful b***h.
"Not again."

She keeps killing our favorite players—
Celebrities who are "out on a run"
With too much money
And not enough strength—

And there goes Hoffman—

The young craps player,
The gay boom operator,
The male nurse,
The mattress man—

The Master of The Cause

Jeff Gangwer

The Mormon Melvin Udall

You met me at my best...
...and that's why you fell in love with me

Years ago,
In college,
I was a jerk—
I was the jerk's jerk—
The guy that people avoided—
The Mormon Melvin Udall

Had you met me earlier in life...
...you wouldn't have stayed with me

Jeff Gangwer

The New Paradigm

My loaded
brush
flattens
the
white,
latex paint
so it
can cure
on
the walls
and
on
the moldings—
a brilliant,
smooth,
solid film—
a new
beginning—
a new paradigm—
color,
protection,
and
texture

Jeff Gangwer

The One-Dollar Seat

It's a one-dollar seat—
Just a one-dollar seat—
Yeah—
I know that—
And a one-dollar movie,
A choppy film print of Evil Dead—
The re-boot,
The re-imagining—
Whatever they call it—
The one with the recovering heroin addict
And the friends
Who all die horribly
One by one—
From Olivia, who cuts her face open with a shard of broken mirror,
To Natalie, who severs her arm with an electric carving knife
Before the 'evil dead' can possess her—
And I notice to lack of decorum—
Namely, the lack of theater decorum—
You know,
Decorum at the movie theater—
Regardless of the one-dollar price—
The requisite decency, propriety,
And respectability,
And other such politesse—
Polite little rules—
Rules that help us—
Rules that help the a**holes—
Rules that help me—
Rules like,
Don't talk during the feature,
Don't use your cell phone during the feature,
And don't let your noisy, disgusting children run about in a celebration from aisle to aisle as if the prophets and the apostles have announced the Second Coming of the Messiah and your hideous offspring have been sugared to the gills in the meantime
Or down the center way—
Down the f*****g thoroughfare—! —
Or anywhere else where somebody might be trying to enjoy the butchery and the dismemberment and the rain of blood in response to the prophecies written in the Naturom Demonto, the Sumerian Book of the Dead—that godforsaken book that those beautiful people should've kept closed—
And I think,
'A dollar or no,
'What's happening in our society?
'Where's our sense of right and wrong—
'Our sense of decorum? '

Jeff Gangwer

The Proposal

At Temple Square in Salt Lake City:

I drop to my right knee at Rebeca's feet

(The grass is damp, but the sun is shining)

I hesitate

This is it

(I even practiced)

I choke a little and apologize for my less-than-perfect Spanish:
"Eres mí mejor amiga y compañera.
"Eres la persona más importante en mí vida.
"Tu lo eres todo para mí.
"Te amo mucho, mucho.
"¿Te casarías conmigo? "

Despite my numerous faults and my glaring imperfections,
She accepts my marriage proposal through tears of joy—
"Of course! "—
A priceless gift on my twenty-ninth birthday

Jeff Gangwer

The Rain in Guacimo

The rain
in Guacimo
fell so ferociously
that the rising
flood waters,
in great streams,
ran from
the streets
and spilled
into
the
gutters

And while
under a roof,
I watched
my mother-in-law
on her bed,
from across the room,
while she
gently stroked
the head of
my napping Wife—
her
only
daughter—
a tender scene
that
played
for decades
before I arrived
to
witness
it

Jeff Gangwer

The Ride

Are you like me?

Do you enjoy the ride?

Which part of the ride is your favorite?

Do you most enjoy the slow buildup of the climb...?

Or do you most enjoy the heart-stopping exhilaration of the fall...?

What do you enjoy most?

Are you like me?

Jeff Gangwer

The Sandwich

I built
a delicious sandwich
and then devoured it while a group of starving children watched me

I wiped
the excess honey mustard
from the corner of my mouth

I noticed
later in the day
that the sandwich wasn't riding well in my First World digestive system

Still, I love anything between bread,
including lettuce, tomatoes, spinach, peppers, onions,
cheese, ham, turkey, pastrami, roast beef,
and all the other good things that carry me from one abomination to the next,
even if I happen to move and step on small necks that are crushed
from the soles of my John Lobbs—
nothing but footholds on my way to the top

Jeff Gangwer

The Shoes Hit the Pavement

Movement—
Circular movement:
The shoes hit the pavement....
Then some gravel;
Then some grass;
Then the pavement again—
Soft—then hard....
The movement is consistent
And controlled
And rhythmic....

The road—
Countless paths on a single cut:
Divisions and cracks
And rollers
And suggestions of movement—
Circular movement:
The road runner works;
He runs and he works
And his path is decided:
He runs and he works and he continues....

Jeff Gangwer

The Sounds of the House

Without a thought for poetry,
I sit and listen to the sounds of the house

The clock on the wall in the hallway—
A sound that we never heard until we hung that thing—
Its rustic look and Roman numerals—proof that we have a little class

The refrigerator—doing whatever refrigerators do—
With food for the next three days or so
And then it's "back to the store for more"

The hum of the small fan over the microprocessor under my hands—
And my fingers tapping at the keys—the spongy keys—
Even the Z, the Q, and the X keys

My Wife in the other room—in the master bedroom—
Rolling in her blankets; attempting to sleep; fighting against another morning

Jeff Gangwer

The Spanish / Ejecting Brass

The Spanish from their exquisite faces would test
The abilities of the world's fastest rappers—
A crackling verbosity from their tongues and lips
Like the rapid firing from two automatic firearms—
With ejecting brass and sailing slugs;
Muzzle flashes and percussion pulses—
Warm when they hit your face—
Every word and phrase—
The very definition of "passion"—
Aggravation, irritation, discontent—even fury—
Like every other passion borne in the hearts of Latin women—
Sizzling eggs that whiten and thicken on hot New York City sidewalks—
Just beautiful babblings to the ignorant, English-speaking, English-teaching poet

Jeff Gangwer

The Spike and My Bullet

I was twelve or so

and the spike
entered our field at dusk
where my bullet broke his spine

He was the one
and the only
that I ever killed

and I remember that
the bullet hole was big enough
that I could fit my hand inside of it

I butchered the kill and jerked the meat
and I remember it hanging up in the garage
and cooling down on the racks in the kitchen

Jeff Gangwer

The Universe / The Universes

You may not know...

...but from its beginning,
The universe was never alone or unaided—
A revelation that baffles more than it enlightens

A revelation spurned—
The unbelievers doubting—
The unenlightened scoffing...

...but from one thread to another,
The expanding universe never existed in and of itself—
Like a lone molecule bustling at the speed of chemical reaction

In reality, this world is one of many—
One in the endless expanse of the Infinitum
Where Time and Space are substantive, but never tangible—

Where the universes exist in great turns—
In vast coils and in spirals and in movements—
Lapping and overlapping and overlapping again....

And they are innumerable—
A multitude of multitudes of choice and possibility—
All that begins and continues and begins and continues again

Some are parallel...
...and others branch and stem...
...or divide and shoot....

And all exist—

All exists....

Jeff Gangwer

The Wedding in San José

Nearly six months after the wedding in Utah,
My Wife and I take the plunge again—
This time in her Homeland—
Six days before the start of the World Cup

June Sixth, Two-thousand and Fourteen:

We wake to sunshine and travel to the nearby venue in a taxi

We ready the centerpieces and the decorations

I listen to arguments and opinions that I could never understand

(I notice that my mother-in-law's voice, when elevated, sounds like the Central American Fran Dresher)

We finish and return to the house and dress for the ceremony

When I return to the venue in my suit,
I "work the room" like Ginger in Casino:

I meet friends and family—
And feel like Karen in GoodFellas, who met "two dozen Peters and Pauls at [her] wedding" (and several Maries)

I kiss everybody on their cheeks—
And nobody objects because kissing is customary

My Wife arrives in a pounding rainstorm and three people help her from a car

She looks perfecto—and without apprehension this time

We walk to the front and sit at a table where the preacher tells us to value each other

He illustrates his point with a paper bill, which doesn't lose its value when tossed to the floor and stepped on—and then he demonstrates this act to great effect

(I understand enough of his Spanish to nod and smile)

I'm happy and smiling—or feliz—
One of the few words that I know and use when the guests speak to me

After finishing our meal, a sudden THUNDERING interrupts our quiet evening—
What we thought was a deadly car crash or a gas explosion—

But a Costa Rican carnaval enters the reception hall—! —

Dancers and drummers—! —
Disco lights and artificial smoke—! —
Glitter and sequence—! —
Neon bikinis and feathered headdresses—! —

Twenty-five minutes of POUNDING and PANDEMONIUM!

They place a blue hat on my head and a pink one on Rebeca's

We dance with noisemakers in our mouths

Everybody cheers and celebrates

I dance like Doctor Rockso from Metalocalypse

I dance more than I ever danced in my youth and a river of sweat rolls down my back and into my ass crack—sorry for the image

I dance with my Wife, her mother, and her mother's mother, an eighty-six-year old mistress, named Hayde

One of the drummers hands me his drumsticks and I LET LOOSE on the polyester drumhead like a madman

When the carnaval ends, Rebeca and I work the room together:

I carry her train while she doles out small bags of candy to our guests

I kiss everybody again

(And again when they depart)

When the night is spent
And the guests are finally gone,
I crash on the floor in my J.C. Penny suit—
Exhausted and happily married—twice to the same Bride

Jeff Gangwer

The Wedding in Utah

January Fifteenth, Two-thousand and Fourteen:

'No, I'm not nervous'—

Or so I say as the evening's guests are arriving and I begin to feel the result of some strange brain chemistry from toe tip to fingertip—
Some sort of euphoric wash that sharpens my senses and prepares me for a life with the Woman of my Dreams

I'm not nervous, but I'm circulating the manor of Aspen Landing in my rented black vest and my red silk tie and I'm seesawing like a faith healer while shaking Gringo hands and kissing Hispanic cheeks;
I'm saying, 'Thank you for being here, ' and 'No, I'm not nervous'—and then I kissed Leonard Stallliviere who told me to 'Back off, man! ' and 'Don't be kissin' me.'

Our guests arrive from as far as Oregon and Idaho:
My former stepfather, Ray Lunt; Tim Doman, the Best Man; my old education instructor, Ralph Kern; Will Austin and Matt Macedo, my college buddies; and Drew Dunn, the coolest missionary from the San Pablo Philippines Mission

'No, I'm not nervous'—just words as I check my pulse after I notice that my breathing is quick and narrow—like I swallowed four Excedrin tablets

An hour ago, I was picking up the bouquets and my boutonniere from the flower shop in Sandy with my mother in tow and we heard the steady, violent rumbling from the tires (or wheels) of Rebeca's little car—
Another hitch in the plan

'I think it's getting worse, ' I said—
'I think it's on my side.'
'I hope the wheels don't fall off! '

We stopped at the neighboring Les Schwab Tire Center and this guy named Dave tells us that the rubber tread from the rear tires—God knows why—is breaking and splitting—BREAKING and SPLITTING—and that the front passenger side wheel bearing is loose and wiggling—LOOSE and WIGGLING

And I don't believe in bad omens—but at the same time, over in Taylorsville, Rebeca is using a steam iron to frantically smooth out the wrinkles in her bridal veil—and she burns a hole in the fabric that's big enough for you to stick your head through!

I pay the bill at Les Schwab and remind myself that marriage is ordained of God—a sacred institution, a blessed, holy, rewarding union, the right thing to do, et cetera

Bishop Terry Wright shows up and I'm relieved to know that the ship will sail

We shake hands and I say, 'Thank you for being here.'

No, I'm not nervous

The groomsmen descend with the bridesmaids; then the flower girl and the ring bearer—young Brianna and little Genesis

Then the Bride descends and everybody stands—
My Rebeca—
And she looks muy hermosa (like I knew she would) —
Mi Novia Latina perfecta—
Mi Esposita

She carefully steps from the stairway and joins me at the head of the room near the arch and the bishop

We hold hands through the rush that was our ceremony and reception—a three hour celebration that felt like a three minute mixture of adrenaline and chocolate-marshmallow milkshake

We line up and greet our guests as Husband and Wife

Several men stuff cash into the jacket pocket of my tuxedo

We stand for pictures and smile through the fatigue of winter as the flashes nearly blind us in the dimly lit reception hall

We cut and sample our white, raspberry flavored cake—and it's a little too small (but certainly tastier than anything served elsewhere)

Rebeca throws a bouquet of artificial flowers that she prepared for the occasion—and my mom catches it (but gives it to another)

We dance awkwardly (but romantically) to Shania Twain's 'From This Moment On' and I look down to watch and ensure that I don't step on the dress

Finally, at 9: 15, we depart from under a cascading shower of blazing sparkler gems

Jeff Gangwer

The Youth at the Mall

The youth at the mall look like characters
from a story set in the year 3000
and to me, they look silly
in their tight, glittery,
homogeneous fashion statements—
The young men looking like they sell their mouths—
and the young women looking like they sell their a**es—
but maybe I'm just too old an' too boring to get what they're sellin'

Jeff Gangwer

There is No Christ

A man declared:

"There is no Christ, there is no god—
"No one to save us, no one to redeem us—
"No one to pull us up or out of this goddamn, f****n' hole...."

Another answered:

"If there is no Christ,
"Then you're right: there is no god—
"No one to save us, no one to redeem us—

"And no one to pull us out of the hole—

"But now we're hinging on 'if'—
"And for me, the hinge swings
"To the affirmative:

"And so I testify,

"There is a Christ, there is a God;
"One to save, One to redeem;
"One to pull us up and out of this hole....

"There are no atheists at the meth house, the church house, or at the Super Bowl...."

In the end,
They flipped a coin—
But settled nothing....

Jeff Gangwer

Thirty-Three Thousand Defeats

I don't like to hurt you,
But I know that I do when you roll to your belly so I can finish—
Your face in the fabric like thirty-three thousand defeats

Jeff Gangwer

Those Cadillac Hands

I looked down and saw
Those Cadillac hands—
Those John Deere hands—
Hands that built and wrenched and worked—
Hands that played and loved

My granddad's hands—
A father's hands—
A husband's,
A son's,
A farmer's hands

A lot was built with those hands—
Through years and decades;
A lot was fixed with those hands—
Cars and trucks,
Trailers and wagons, tractors and implements

A welder's hands,
A mechanic's hands,
A man's hands

Who can know the work of a man—
The life of a man—
The value of a man?

I reached down and touched
Those Cadillac hands—
Those John Deere hands—
Those clay-like hands—
Those lovely hands

I hope that mine will be as useful...
...and that mine will be as valued

He was born and buried on November First—
The span of eighty-two years

A man in a clean John Deere 3320 lowered
The concrete lid over the interment site

The deceased would have smiled

Jeff Gangwer

Thoughts and Feelings

Conjecture
Inference
Speculation

Something believed—
Something supposed

Approximations
Calculations
Estimations

Something felt—
In confidence

Convictions
Judgments
Opinions

Views—
Passions

Preferences
Persuasions
Partialities

Morals—
Ethics

Standards—
Applications

Methods—
Processes

Rites—
Ceremonies

Something more than
Something believed

Something more than
Something supposed

Determinations
Manifestations
Motivations

A drive
A leap

Our experiences are sensory

We investigate
We observe
We study

We consider
The facts and the figures

We realize
We conceptualize

We arrive
At a place beyond conception

Awareness
Cognizance
Sentience

Actuality
Certainty
Reality

Believing is not knowing, but
Knowing is believing

Tomorrow,
The sun will rise

Tomorrow,
The sun will rise

In this,
I have faith

Jeff Gangwer

Tongues at Work / Liquid Swords

Beats a-blastin' an'
Records a-scratchin'

Mic's ablaze an'
Jaws unhinged

Tongues at work—
Liquid swords

Fire spittin' an'
Knowledge droppin'

Wisdom from the streets an'
Music from the gutter

Mad hustle an'
Tactile flow

Rhymes an'
Verses

Sonic cocaine an'
Aural poetry

Gods in the booths an'
Words in the air

Jeff Gangwer

Total Annihilation

Sometimes I look at these brash, dead-eyed little f*****s
And smiling, consider the injustice of the world:

These will all die—
Every last sack—
Even the pretty ones—
Some in cars; others in pools—
And others, remarkably,
At the hands of their loved ones—
But hopefully not before "their time"
With news headlines blazing—
And hopefully with dignity,
Quiet and sweet

Jeff Gangwer

Two Horses—Together in a Harness

My Wife and I are like two horses—together in a harness—
The Costa Rican Beauty and the luckiest Mustang in the North American West

Jeff Gangwer

Two Tufts / Wrinkles and Makeup

That smile—
That misleading smile—
Where those two tufts of your skin
Turn and sink—
Can't hide the fact
That you'll die someday—
Your face freezing
In its wrinkles and makeup—
Mourners looking into your coffin—
Our love never ending

Jeff Gangwer

Two Young Scamps

We sat idling at a stoplight when
Two pieces of cottonwood fuzz
Hovered up and into the air
And swirled like two young scamps
That we elatedly called, "You an' me! "

Jeff Gangwer

Useless Words

useless words—
words on a page—
words without purpose

nothing needed, nothing wanted—
nothing from me, nothing for you

Useless words—
Words on this page—
This page, glowing or printed—

Or words on another—
More than just useless words—

More than the limitations of language—
As if the entire length and breadth of all creation
Fell from the poet's brain and landed HERE with ease—nothing fearing

Words that move—
Units of thought caught in a dance,
Shuffling and kicking—the little kicks—and turning
And moving forward and spinning—stuck in a bossa nova—
The musicians in full effect—
Strumming the nylons,
Tickling the ivories on the old eighty-eight,
Working the tubs and the pies at the blasting kit,
Slicing into the strings to sweeten the whole useless enchilada—
Moving and dancing and playing to improve the groove

Jeff Gangwer

Voices

I just love the way the pretty snow hits the landscape.
It's like I'm looking into a dream—you know?
And I love dreams—the ones where it's just me
And no one else and I'm on top of the world.

One time, I went to my gran'ma's house
And I ate cookies
And hot cocoa
And Chex Mix
And Christmas candy.
(But not licorice.)
It was good.
I love gran'ma.

I like America.
Is where I come to make a good life for day family.
My family is a good.
My wife is a good and she is make me happy.
Is nice.
Will you make day food?
Will you...is good?

I don't watch it no more—the news—[scoffs]—
See what's s'ppose' t' be happenin' in the world today.
It's all drugs an' violence anyway.
'Times change, ' they say.
'Times're bad, ' I say.
Shoot.
My wife—her name's Kelita—
Well, most of us called ‘er Peggy—
She died some years ago—
She an' I use' t' watch the news.
Since then...I have no dad-gum use for it.
Peggy [clears throat]....
They don't make ‘em like they used to.
These girls—these people today.
That blue hair. That gall-darn metal in their lips.
You should see these young girls now—
An' I try an' tell ‘em:
'You can't wear that out the house out in public an' expect me not t' say somethin' about what y're wearin' out in full view like that.'
It's just not right.

I don't think my mom would let me see that.
She says movies with the sharks will give me bad thoughts.

Mobb Deep, kid—Prodigy:
'Your crew is featherweight
'My gunshots'll make you levitate
'I'm only nineteen, but my mind is old
'An' when things get for real
'My warm heart turns cold.'

Credit?
Yeah, I got credit.
I used my debit card to pay my uncle's phone bill.

The Human Centipede 2: Full Sequence
Was so gnarly, bro.
The first one was lame, right?
But the sequel was so much better.
Black ‘n' white, dude.
'100% medically in-accurate.'
Martin, dude.

Can you believe these people?
What's the deal here? !
Bunch ‘o bums!

Look-at-‘is-guy.
You-see-dis-guy?
F'get-about-it.

'You tell ‘em, Skeeter! '

It hurts when I breathe.
I have bronchitis in my chest.
Where's Frank?

Jeff Gangwer

Voices I Heard in 2012

They tell me I should write more poetry.
Yeah—
'Write more poetry.'
That's easier said than done, my friend.

Obama!
O-ba-ma!
O-BA-MA!

I broke free.
I had a Jolly Rancher stuck in my teeth.
But I broke free.

Dude.
You suck at adding people on Facebook.

I pick the grey one—
Grey's my color—
Well—not grey, but silver.
There's a difference.
And black.
Silver and black.
(It's the nation, man.)
So, I pick the grey one...and she starts:
'Get the Saints one. It's better. The Saints even won the Super Bowl after Katrina.
They're really good.'
I don't say anything to her; I just pick the silver one.
(The Raiders won a few, too, I could add...but I don't.)
I think it and don't say it.
It's best to smile and look at her eyes—
Pale eyes—
Honest eyes—
Eyes that bother and soothe—
Eyes like sugar.

Just—stop.
Okay?
You're just—
I don't need your help.

Okay.
I'm just...tryin' to help.

Slug, son—Atmosphere:
'I said, I'll make you smile for the simple fact I'm good at it
'I'll make you smile just so I can sit an' look at it.'

'I will show you all you need to know
'You must hold on to anyone that wants you
'And I will love you through [the] simple and the struggle
'But, girl, you gotta understand the modern man must hustle.'

That's enough.
The next person to talk will be in trouble.
I'm serious.
That's enough.
You stop that.

I like movies.
They are funny.
Some are even scary.
I like The Texas Chainsaw Massacre.
I like movies where people die at the end.

She was a difficult child to raise.
In fact, when she didn't get along with her brother,
I'd put both of them on the couch and say,
'Okay...neither of you will be allowed to leave'—and then I'd make ‘em hold each other's hands—'until both of you can get along....'
And that seemed to work.
Maybe I could have done things differently.

'No guns, no killing! '

'Oh...you think darkness is your ally.... But you merely adopted the dark.... I was born in it...molded by it.... I didn't see the light until I was already a man; by then it was nothing to me but BLINDING! '

That's enough of that nonsense right now.

I'll give you a knuckle sandwich.

The world will end this year.

Jeff Gangwer

Waving to the Ugly Horse

On a dull, muggy Sunday morning,
We drove past the ugly horse in her corral—
A mangy filly—alone and lonely—
As she scratched about without passion or freedom

We waved to her from the windows,
But she didn't seem to notice

You leaned back into the shoulder harness
And drifted off for a minute—
Your face looking a little dispirited—
Sad because you waved and she probably didn't see you

Jeff Gangwer

We

We slave under florescent tubes,
We suffer under bureaucracies,
We consume and fatten,
We drink and stammer,
We covet and spend,
We max out credit cards,
We give in to materialism,
We look to the sky for answers,
We worship fantastic, mythical gods,
We put money in collection bowls,
We visit malls without purpose,
We see movies that suck,
We irrigate lawns; then mow them,
We take medications,
We fret about nothing,
We complain about everything,
We read published bulls**t,
We laugh at commercials,
We accept mediocrity,
We celebrate ineptitude,
We vote and deny responsibility

Jeff Gangwer

We—

We—
Each of us—
Are alone in the world—
Like a boxer
Unaided in the ring,
Swinging with all his might—
His heart raging—
Tired,
Bloodied—
Fighting for his very life

Jeff Gangwer

What We Spend

A life is measured in what we spend—
The days we live, the time we take—
Even the time we waste—needlessly—
The grains of sand slipping
Through the neck of the glass

A life is measured in what we spend—
The energy we use, the breath we expel—
The chest pains from a Saturday morning run—
The hip and leg strains from a romp in the bed—
Sultry smiles and beads of sweat

Jeff Gangwer

When I Kissed You

When I kissed you and took in some air in an peculiar way,
I vacuumed a wispy lock of your hair into my mouth and onto my tongue—
A moment when the love that we share was real, palpable, and filled with our laughter

Jeff Gangwer

Words That Offend

Ah, yes,
Words that offend—
Words that turn round faces into sour masses—
The eyes widening in the skulls—

Sounds from mouths—
Sounds that move and slip through the air—
Waves and vibrations—
Just enough to send mothers into conniption fits

Words that offend—
Slurs like "bootlip, " "Buddhahead, " or "taco bender"—
"Porch monkey, " "nip, " or "wetback"—
Terms that sound more comical than hurtful

Words like "minorities"—
A word more offensive than "n*****s, " "japs, " or "beaners"—
A word more offensive than "c**t, " with its sharp C, N, and T—
Words that offend simply because they don't appear in the biblical text

The words of the common man—
The vulgar man, wholly in his element—
The sailor at sea, the big rig driver on the road, the laborer at the site—
The people from Ohio, Massachusetts, and New Jersey

Facial farts from verbal diarrhea

Yuck

Jeff Gangwer

Workers of the Earth

I thank God for the workers of the earth—
Those who rise to plant and harvest—
The same who cultivate—
The field ready,
The ground shaking,
The soil breaking—
The driver at the wheel,
His tractor rolling

And with dust rising upward,
He looks down the field—
By way of progress—
And finding a landmark—
A post or something other—
He aims and trains the assemblage—
His belching tractor and the implements—
And gains ground, feeding all

Jeff Gangwer

Worship at the Rainbow-Lit Church House

We walk into the rainbow-lit church house—
The sacrilege of the earsplitting rock ‘n' roll cranked to eleven—
And party with the Jesus freaks who line up to suck God's magical meat hammer—
Tonguing the tip and sliding to the base—
Down to the nuggets—
Goin' whole hog—
Their heads bobbing wonderfully—
A procession of empyreal angels and stratospheric fellatio

Jeff Gangwer