

Poetry Series

Tom J. Mariani

- poems -

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Tom J. Mariani (January 1948)

I was born in San Francisco and have lived in Northern California all my life. My first full-time job, while working my way through college, was as an apprentice pressman for the SF 'Chronicle/Examiner.' The first year I worked there, 1966, 'The Sound of Music' won the Academy Award for Best Picture. However, a more accurate indication of coming attractions was that Janis Joplin had just come back to San Francisco from Texas to join Big Brother and the Holding Company and sing at the Avalon Ballroom. Looking back it seems that I missed most of the Summer of Love. I had no time to hang out in Golden Gate Park during the day, nor in the Haight at night. I was trying to earn enough to afford to work only part time during the college year.

After college, my day jobs for eighteen years were in bank management; first with Wells Fargo than a local bank in Santa Rosa.

What do I think are some of the other influences on my writing that you should be warned about? I am a fifth generation native Californian. I have a picture of my great-grandparents, the second generation, taken in 1907 aboard a six-horse team wagon loaded with tan bark for a leather tannery. He also hauled railroad ties to complete the line north of Willits into Southern Humboldt County, and drove a mail/stage coach. She raised their four daughters and ran their ranch on her family's homestead (see my poem 'It May Not Seem Fair') .

The rest of my life? You wouldn't believe it if I had the time to tell you.

I have had a few of my poems and prose essays published. ('North Bay Bohemian online 06-04-08 and 04-22-09 'OPEN MIC.')

Two of my short stories ('A Short Leap' JULY 2008 AND 'Fragments of the News,' JANUARY 2009 in somalit.com and one of my poems, 'What Stage Is He On?' March 2009) Most of my poems are fictional constructs. Some are autobiographical: e.g. 'DETOUR' and 'Learning To Run Errands.' The rest? It's up to you to figure out.

Works:

'Stopped In The Final Round' The TomCat 1992 Petaluma, CA
'The Lady at the Desk Wouldn't Understand' 'First Leaves 2002' 62nd annual art and literary journal and 'First Leaves 2009', Board of Trustees Santa Rosa Junior College

***** 08-25-09 ***THE KENNEDYS - - - Myth or Reality?**

Ted: February 22,1932
August 25,2009 - - - 77 years
Why we never had to
Take him out

The way we did
Jack and Bobby
His two
Irsh punk brothers

They thought
They could double deal
After we delivered
For their dad

Old man Joe
He knew
Who he had
To take care of

We brought him booze
During Prohibition
We brought him votes
To make his kid President

Whatda his kids do for us
Screwed up getting us back into Cuba
Got Jimmy H. locked up and
Kicked outta the Teamsters

Ted lived a long life
'Cause he learned
Not to screw around
With us

[and just who is us? The Rolling Stones answered that question in their song
'SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL - - - 'Who shot the Kennedy's? After all it was you and
me.']

Tom J. Mariani

*****05-09**SYMPTOMS of Being a Poet**

What does one do
If one finds oneself
Suffering the symptoms
Of being a poet?

Try to gargle aloud
Uttering gargling sounds
It may cleanse the contagion
Before it enters your system

That's all you can do
Once the rest of the symptoms start
You feel it in your head
It pounds in your heart

Your forehead feels warm
You cannot sit still
Words start coming out
Pages and pages you fill

It's like a fever
Compelling you to write
It does not come out easy
There still is a big fight

It's like a civil war
Words want out right away
Some content is stuck while
The brain argues for its way

Then writer's block hits
It's like serious constipation
On top of feeling ill
You can't go

You sit for a long time
Nothing happens
No need for paper
You have only pain

Accompanied by the urge
To let loose
The more you concentrate
Nothing happens

So you give up
Stand up and walk away
Take a long walk outdoors
Deep into Frost's snowy woods

Suddenly the urge
It's all there at once

And it catches you
With no paper.

Tom J. Mariani

*****6-25-09**What Soughs Through Me**

If you admitted hearing voices
In ancient times they would have called you
A shaman a prophet a seer or
Maybe even Moses

In Salem you would have been called
A witch a warlock or
One possessed needing to be
Put to death

Part of the art
Of being a poet
Is to listen to the voices
As they sough through you

The sounds are gentle reminders
To pay attention to a color
A smell a word a sight
Then to remember it in words

As a poet I claim
The words I write are mine
But in truth I have heard them
As they rustled through me

It's like hearing the wind
It's not the wind I hear
It's what the wind blows through
And against

Tom J. Mariani

*****AUG 13-09***For the Thousands That Have Destroyed It**

It took only one
To restore
My faith in man

Here's what it took
I was low on printer paper
So I went to an office supply store

Just got out of my Jeep
When a dirty 20 something
Asks can help him and his old lady

I don't see an old lady
But he unfolds an old cardboard sign
That says so

I've got a couple of bucks
Of loose change
In my pocket

I dig it out
Hand it to him
He's profusely grateful

Just then a toothless old guy
Rolls oujt of the store
Asks the youngster for a smoke

As I walk away I hear
'Don't have a smoke,
but I will share with you

What I just got.'
I go in the store
As they share my two bucks

By the time I turn to go back
To give them more
They're gone

Tom J. Mariani

*****July 1 2009***Giving His Boots a Rest**

He is resting
In a comfortable Library chair
With his boots and jacket on
His backpack is nearby

He's reading today's paper
And has three plastic covered
Magazines stacked on the floor
To read next

He's in from the cold and rain
He's in where it's warm and dry
He's been to the men's room to
Wash himself and his socks and shorts

Wrapped in a plastic bag
He'll dry them later
Now he's trying to get his boots to dry
They're damp and well worn

They are not worn out
Just like him
They are well worn
They've covered many miles

He's worked in them
He's slept in them
To keep warm and to see
That they are not stolen

Where do you put your shoes at night?
Under you bed? In your closet?
It's been a long time
Since he's had either

How do you
Keep your feet from freezing
In the long hard-frost winter nights?
How do you keep warm?

If you'd never had to worry
You wouldn't appreciate
The warm dry Library chair
That gives his boots a rest

Tom J. Mariani

****[revised 06-19-09] Getting Through October and Beyond**

What is it about October
That makes us think
Spring will not be coming back

The weather will rattle at us
Leaves will fall
Giving us the impression

It's not going to get any better
No amount of experience or
Logic will help

Spring last year won't help
When the shorter days of
Fall and Winter close in

Beyond October

What is it about October
That will assure us
Spring will be coming back

The weather will hint of changes
Leaves brave enough
To let go one by one

Or be pushed in bunches by the wind
Will take momentary flight
Abandoning their accustomed tree

They will make room for new buds
Provide cover for the soil and
Food for those below.

Lots of work to get ready
For Spring next year and to
Just get through Fall and Winter

Then there's November

November will bring
What October teased
October warned us
Rushed at us

Then seemed to pull back
Like a gentle rolling surf
On a rough November day
A wave will rush over our heads

Knocking us down and threatening
To pull us far out to sea

As we float
We'll see the shore disappear

No one will come to help
They won't even know we're gone
'I've got to get to December!'
We'll scream.

'New Year's Day! Easter!
May Day! MAY DAY! '
And we will
Even if we have no idea

Why or how

Tom J. Mariani

****04 - 2009 - Drift, Drown, or Decide**

Do I want
To fall in love again?
No.

Do I want
To work for a living?
No.

Do I like
To eat on a regular basis?
Yes.

These are questions
Not asked
Not answered.

Just because
I don't know
Where this is going,

Doesn't mean
I don't have
To go.

Tom J. Mariani

****05-09 revised 'Expectations'**

What were you expecting
After The 9-11 Attack?

A soldier,
A nurse,

A princess,
Batman,

Tigger,
Dracula,

Spiderman,
Mia Hamn,

A fireman, or
A policeman?

What a place to be.
Age five and under at the

Afternoon Halloween party
At the Community Center 10-27-01.

Then was not the time
To tell them.

They'll soon be thirteen.
It's time they know;

We are no safer now
Than then.

Tom J. Mariani

****07-18-09** IRISH LOVE**

I know I shouldn't of
But I smiled yesterday
When one of my friends
Told me a joke

'Two Irish guys
Are sitting in a pub.'
How many times have I heard
One start out like this

'One guy says to the other,
My wife's a saint
Just a pure saint
My hand to God.'

The other replies,
'Your're lucky
Mine, bless her soul,
Is still alive.'

Tom J. Mariani

****2009** U.S. Election 2008 - comity and cooperation following rancor?**

Don't get your hopes up
There are hachets
Buried barely below the surface
We all know where they are

Prison guards search for hidden weapons
Each and every day
They know they are there
For when the next fight breaks out

Larger political weapons
Are easier to find
We all watched the ceremonies
Where we buried them

Their handles were left
Sticking out just in case
We'll need them again and
Forget where we buried them

Both sides waved their's around
With threatening gestures
To harm or frighten others
Trying to get them to join

Each side was frightened
That not enough others
Would be convinced by fact and reason
Now that our side has won

Both sides have pretended to cooperate
Bury their hachets - - -
Liar Liar
Even with our financial pants still on fire

Tom J. Mariani

****2009** And The Winner Is**

For all of those in the US
Who voted against Obama
Take a good look now
Who is your Mama

Tom J. Mariani

****A Cowboy VALENTINE-She Opened My Eyes - - What a Surprise**

Thought I knew
Where this was a goin'
Sure read the signs wrong
That she was a showin'

All I could see
Was her blue eyes a blinkin'
'Than' I started to fall in love
What in the hell was I thinkin'

My horse has never
Thrown me so hard
I 'spected us to be forever
'Than' she done turned her last card

Cashed in stood up and
Just walked away
Leaving me holding an empty bag
Not knowing what to say

I still have my horse
Of course
And half less of all the rest
Of this mess she left

Tom J. Mariani

****BANG! You're Dead**

Games we used to play
With sticks and cap guns
We made noises with our mouths
Of shooting getting shot and dying

There was no crying over who got shot
You could argue that you were only winged
It was not the farm
You bought

'I'm just grazed! '
We could holler
Reload and keep firing
Ammunition was free

If you could scrounge soda bottles
For rolls of caps - - - your saved those shots
For close range for the noise the smoke the smell
For the rest you'd just yelled BANG!

The battle could go on for hours
Without losing anybody
'Til it was time for lunch or dinner
Or to go in for the night

Now it's a differnt game
The word 'Bang' has been replaced
By 'Young Gang Bangers'
Packin' heaters drivin'old beaters

Slingin' meth crack and weed
Watchin others bleed
Reachin' in baggy pants with a steady hand
No control where the bullets land

Sprayin' sayin' signs flashin' talk's trashin'
Makin' their bones throwing caps like stones
Landing where - - - they don't care
The noise - - - the kick - - - the smell

Who can tell
Who's next
Gunpowder
LOUDER

BANG - - - You and you and
You and you and you
Your'll all
DEAD

Tom J. Mariani

'...and then he just fell down...'

from SPORTS DIGEST Sacramento Bee January 12,2003

'Former boxing world champion
Johnny Tapia was in critical condition
at a Los Vega hospital
after apparently falling at his home

and losing consciousness
early Saturday, hours after
he was charged with
possessing drug paraphernalia.

Tapia, a five -time world chanpion
with a history of problems with the law and drugs
had returned to his home in Las Vegas
after the confrontation with poilce

and was with his wife, Teresa,
when he fell
according to Trayce Zimmerman,
Tapia's publicist.

'(Teresa) said he felt depressed,
and then he just fell down
and lost consciousness.'
Zimmerman said.

Tapia,35 was placed
on a respirator and was
being treated for head trama
Zimmerman said. - Assiciated Press

Tom J. Mariani

^^^ **An Idiom I Wouldn't Have Guessed In a Month of Sundays**

Sitting in a coffee shop
Early the other morning
Getting started for my day
I almost dropped my cup

I was reading the paper
About health insurance costs
Stock market dives
And sub-prime credit woes

When one of the guys
In the booth behind me
Leaned over to his friend and quietly said
I guess not expecting me to hear

I swear to God
His exact words were
And I quote
'My dick's fallen off.'

I hadn't been
Paying much attention
To their conversation
Up until then

With my hot coffee
Almost jumping into my lap
My ears perked up to hear
The rest of this tragedy

Obviously his friend
Was not as shocked
As I was
At this news flash

His calm reply was
'Mine too.
It's not that uncommon
At our age after all.'

They were both taking it
Far better than if
It had happened to me
For God's sake

His friend continued
'My doctor tells me
There are several things
That can be done.

For best results He wants to
Run some tests to see

What may have triggered it.'

I wanted to know too
So I could avoid doing
Whatever these guys did
To lose trigger and all

He went on 'They don't just
Throw Viagra at you
The way they used to.
Could be nerve damage,

Or something else.'
- - - Something else - - -
Now the lights
Were finally coming on

Come to think of it
I knew lots of things
That had fallen off lately
Attendance in schools - - - voter turnout

Nothing had actually
Dropped off entirely
It was only
A performance issue

Their use of an idiom
Made me feel like a blockhead
I was relieved to learn their doctors
Had something left to work with

Tom J. Mariani

12-07-07 No Poem Here

Just an observation on the anniversary of the failed intelligence that led to the US being unprepared and surprised by the attack on Pearl Harbor. An estimated loss of American lives that day 3,400.

It was also on this date in 1917 that the US declared war on Austria-Hungary.

I write this in light of the recent reevaluation of Iran's nuclear capability and intentions.

Two articles in the London Times today reflect that we haven't come very far since 1917. 1) 'It should ceretainly not be the basis for declaring peace in our time and welcoming those nice Iranians back into the global family....(Iran's) proxies and friends in Hezbollah and Hamas and among the Iraqi Shia extremists.'

2) new threats of Balkins conflict - -Serbia made threats of war with the breakaway province of Kosovo.

I have no poems about this. I went to bed last night after watching a re-run on TV of 'I Robot' starring Will Smith. Neither this fiction nor my reflections on reality this morning give me much encouragment for positive developments in world peace.

Thanks. I just had to let someone else know.

Tom J. Mariani

1968 Talking About the Revolution

I took off my glasses
that I might see
I took off my shoes
that I might be

The one I was in search of
The one I never had
The one that by finding
I would be so glad

I took off my watch
so I wouldn't know the time
I took off to nature
hoping to find the sign

The one I was in search of
The one I never had
The one that by finding
I would be so glad

I started to take off my clothes
I thought the last distraction
Then luckily I realized - - -
This is just a poem- - - an abstraction

Tom J. Mariani

2008 August - The Cheese Stands Alone

How do you
Deal with
Having fallen
Into the hole

You have dug?

When is it
Going to be
The First Day in
The Rest Of Your Life?

When are all
Your chances
Used up
And gone?

How do you exit
Gracefully, while
Taking the blame
For all this mess?

And it is a mess.
Unrecoverable, unimaginable,
Dark shallow breathing,
Despair that does not end.

Look around:
For friends and the
Laughter of family,
Occasions for joy,

Where are they now?

Driven away?
Ignored.? Neglected?
Did you expect
Them to stay?

Un-nurtured then faded.
Time took some away,
Even before
You noticed the loss.

You made a circle
To protect yourself:
Careful who you let in,
Careless who you let out.

Now alone,
The circle shakes,
Not able to support itself,

It blows away.

The Cheese
stands
Alone.

Tom J. Mariani

2008 October 2008: In Times of War, What's the Big Difference?

Note: I got 'permission' from Marvin Bell to write this poem. Well, not directly from Marvin, but from his new collection of his poems: 'MARS BEING RED.' I hope he thinks I'm a dead man.

from 'The Poems I Want to Hear' by Marvin Bell
'There is glacier time, tundra time, volcano time, what is
-time?
to believe in time is to clasp regret to one' bosom. is it
-not? '

from 'The book of the Dead Man
(Writing the Dead Man Poem) by Marvin Bell
'It is in the dead man's mission to show up the illusions of
-time, the discrete, chaos, order, health, and
-whosoever misuses quantum mechanics one day
-and the death of armies the next.'...

+++++

In Times of War, What's The Big Difference?

What is the big difference
Sitting at home with TV on
Watching Wolf Blitzer et al.
Comment on presidential debates

Watching and listening to the candidates
Take turns explaining to us
If only they had been in office
Back then we'd be so much better off

Economically - - - politically - - - internationally

Yes- - -what's the big difference between
Listening to them talk about the Iraq War
And me getting off my fat ass
And doing something about it

Why am I listening
To them
Just daysaway from the election
Talk about what they would have done

I can talk about what I would have done - - -
While I've stood by this war started
We were only going in 'cause we had to - - - aimed at us
Who else could take his nukes and chemicals away

He wouldn't prove he didn't have them
Look what he used on his own people
Who are the Kurds anyway
And there was the Gulf War

Should'a finished him there
Are we the only ones who
Pay attention to UN resolutions
Then of course there was 9-11

That changed all the rules
As if there were any before
So while I've watched from the sidelines
4,185 plus Americans have gotten

Their names listed on a CNN casualties site
Most with their picture

In the '60s and '70s we knew how to stop an unjust war
We had sit-ins we had marches we protested
We broke replaceable windows - - - we were going to
Shut American down economicaly and politically

Embarrass Uncle Sam inernationally

On April 30,1975 that war stopped - - -
After fifteen years and 1.4 million American troops dead
That's when we were actice risking arrest
What would we do now- - -

What would it take to stop this war
Before fifteen years and 1.4 million A merican troops dead?
Will it take four more dead students in O hi o?
What am I going to do about it?

What are you going to do about it?

Tom J. Mariani

2008: Assisted Living

*As I struggle with her
To put on her another clean Depend
I wonder if this is how it will end

Someone struggling with me
Clumsy the first time
Attempting to change mine

*Dedicated to Murph and her much to long battle with dementia and cancer.
Octavio Paz: 'No hay salida? '
- - -Is there no way out?

Tom J. Mariani

2008: from 2001 - Just Enough To Win

No wasted energy here
You have to watch closely
Before you realize that older
And gray to playing way

Below his level

For him
It's a rather light half-court workout
Winner's outs lots of youth
He's mediator coach and

Outside go-to guy

He doesn't bang much
In the middle anymore
He's just where he needs to be
When he needs to be

Slightly above inside and
A step ahead

Tom J. Mariani

2008: Grandpa Will Never Be Asked To Help With Homework Again

Had the grandkids overnight
Dinner baths and do homework
Before TV - - - their Mom said
Before TV

I cleared and washed dishes
Grandma supervised baths
Then homework - - -
To speed things up
I offered to help so I could see TV too

Working on silent 'e's
Grandma came up with cut to cute
I added butt to butte
Never to be asked again

Tom J. Mariani

2008: Held In Custody

copyright 04-21-08
for single-parent urban Moms
Happy Mother's Day

When I was growing up
She was like
The large green dense bush
That now grows in my yard

You wouldn't want to
Brush up against it's
Stiff spiked green leaves
They protect not only the bush

They serve as an effective barrier
Only allowing those in
That are small enough to perch
Inside and flit around

Protected from stray cats
Roaming dogs
Large birds
Heavy storms

In our old neighborhood
The shootings assaults robberies
Drugs rapes riots - - - when we lived at home
Her presences above and all round us

Kept us safe - gave us a place
To grow and show we were ready
To fly away on our own
Into the even less friendly world

Tom J. Mariani

2008: Is It Worth It?

*Tom J. Mariani - -a found poem on a Starbucks' cup
credit to Katy Croff

People often ask
if it is worth it
to work at sea
*(or to write poetry)

isolated from the world
far from loved ones,
seasick, and running on
three hours' sleep.

*(When you can't write
you watch the clock creep)

To lay eyes on something
never before seen by anyone,
to learn something new
about our planet,

*(Stacks of rejection slips.
Will one make it?)

for that one moment
of discovery -yes,
it is
all worth it.

Tom J. Mariani

2008: It Still Bugs Me It's No Longer Green

For those of you who were not reading
The 'San Francisco Chronicle' back when
The sports section was printed
On green newsprint

- - - you may not see the loss as I do

They throw us old readers a bone
They still call it 'The Sporting Green'
Sometimes printing the heading in green
on white newsprint - BFD

- - - if you know what I mean

They said the cost of green newsprint
Had gotten too high
So had the ballplayers' salaries
But they weren't all replaced with white rookies

- - - if ya know what I mean

Every morning Mon. to Sat. - - - there it was
Green and ready to be
Pulled out from the other sections
I might look at later

Regardless of how big the paper was
How they folded it
I could always put my hands on
Last night's final scores and today's schedules

It tucked neatly into my back pocket
So on my first break
I could read about
Some of the other games

You could tell who in the shop
Played the ponies
Their attention was on
Yesterday's results and payouts

Constantly checking and rechecking
Before it was time
To turn in their betting slips to Mary-the-Book
On the loading dock

No live racing on your iPhone
Not even Watch-and-Wager
At the fairgrounds back then
To get your bets down

You had write them down

Hand the slips to Mary-the-Book and wait
You knew the guys who had other bookies
You'd find them in the phone booth calling their's in

That's another thing I'm not happy about
Seeing gone - - - phone booths made calls private
Close the door you could cuss cry call your girlfriend
No one - - - not even your wife had to know

Now I have to search all through the 'Chron'
To find Sports - It's is 'wrapped around'
Want-ads Business Style or some other crap
They say that saves money too

Talk about not saving something
Bay Meadows is gone
Had it's last horse race
Gonna be condos business parks and

Apartments with the latest designs above retail
High density communal living
You can bet somebody's go'na make a buck
Environmentally green unlike how they now view horse shit

- - - if you know what I mean

Nature's noblest beast
Along with bovines and their gas
Are no longer considered
Environmentally friendly

We now live with computer wagering
Attendance at tracks is down
Mary is out of a job
Circulation at the paper is down too

- - - you may not sense the loss

It's like your seventy percent
Partially clogged artery
It's still functioning right now but wait
'Til the day it hits ya

- - - if ya know what I mean

Tom J. Mariani

2008: I've Got News For You

Words describing the
Sharp silents sounds
Of a single edged razor blade
Slicing through wrist and vein - -

Blank verse summoning sights
Of dark red blood pumping
Into a clutterd sink - -
Is not poetry.

Expaining the blood stains
While cleaning up the mess
With bandaged wrists the next day - -
Is not poetry.

It may be cofessional.
It may diffuse a fire
That was buring out of control.
If anywhere it goes in your diary.

Don't fling your bloody wrists at me
By making up a metaphor.
Until I see the scars,
It is not poetry.

Tom J. Mariani

2008: My Writing

Sometimes I need to write
At 3 AM
When the house is
Dark and quiet

Nothing
But the LEDs
Watching
Me work

Often I need music
Sometimes my mixes
Then a single artist's CD
Or random automated all-night FM radio

There are times
My writing needs a boost
From Starbucks or Peets
Soft music and socialization

I am inspired too
By the shouts of children
Fighting over who got
The best toy with their Happy Meal

I live in this world
I draw from this world
What I write I write
About this world and others

Tom J. Mariani

2008: Nothing To Talk About

She sat down in the booth with her drink and her number
Her lunch was cooking then they'd bring it to her
She looked so alone elderly with washed-out color of hair
Then he caught up and sat down across from her

Looked to be her son or about that age
So thin with a dirty pony tail couldn't sit still
Few words no smiles he looking left and right she down
Her tray came nothing for him he can't sit

Tells her he's going to look for a store
She tells him Lucky's is just across the street
Standing he looks out the windows
Like he doesn't know what direction to go

Then he's gone and back quickly bought nothing
Still can't sit asks if it's OK if he goes back outside
She looks so lonely no one to talk to
When he's here or when he must step outside

She know what he needs and can't find
He comes back in looking for her
She's not in the booth he can't wait
He's back outside by their car pacing around

She's out of the bathroom walking to her car's driver's side
He need a ride somewhere for something he can't talk about
I wouldn't think he'd find what he wants around here
But I may not know where to look or who to talk to

Tom J. Mariani

2008: Prose vs Poetry and Found Prose Poetry

As Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancynet Marinere'
is not about the prevention of the cruelty of albatrosses,

Virgina Woolf's 'The Death of the Moth'
is not about lepidopterology.

Tom J. Mariani

2008: Things I Don't Want to Leave Behind

Didn't want to leave you
With a bad impression
Didn't want to take you
In the wrong direction

Didn't want to fool you
About my affection
Didn't want to leave you
With my last confession

I didn't want to end up
Without a reflection
Didn't want to accept fate
In the end there's no deception

Tom J. Mariani

2008: We Don't Have All the Answers

He's been to Sunday School
He's had a chance to read the Bible
He's see pictures of The Garden
Colored Noah the animals and the Ark

Now he's home and ready to play
Wants to draw a dinosaur
Asks me what colors to use
How big to make the teeth and eyes

I wasn't sure how to tell him
All we have are impressions
On rocks fossilized gray dusty bones
I admitted I wasn't sure

What colors or how big
Science - I did tell him - isn't sure
And the Bible
Just doesn't say

Tom J. Mariani

2008: When You Let Sunlight Work On Your First Draft

We know why the old piece of paper is yellow
It's not because of overuse
With very little written on it
It's been set aside for so long

Not that anyone expected this page
To do anything by itself
He may have had high hopes
When he added a few black lines on white

If he had valued his work
Safely put it away
But it was left exposed
In a corner of the room

Right where the bright morning sun
Not slowed down by the thin glass
Did what he didn' t do
Finished turning the color of the paper

copyright 05-02-08

Tom J. Mariani

A Friend Passing

Resting by the road
Open to the sky
Watching for the birds
And whatever else goes by

Resting by the road
Listening for the rain
Would have made better time
Except for needing the cane

It helps me to get along
Sometimes gets in my way
Just like my friend
With whom I used to share the day

Tom J. Mariani

A Little, Very Little Help With Reading My Poems

Some poems I write are meant to be read
So the reader can tell
Red from read
When he reads

Sometimes the sounds
Carry most of the weight
So listening is the
Best way to hear

Syntax has its place too
Especially when
It is taken
Out of

In some of my others
Where a word is placed
On the page is part of
The meaning of the poem

So without seeing it
Appear on a printed page
You wouldn't

*****get it

11-19-07

Tom J. Mariani

A Poet's Work Is Never Done

What's keeping me
From writing better poetry
(Beyond not finding a word
That rhymes with orange)

I don't see myself as a poet
No one has granted me a license
I have however somehow
Learned how to wheedle words

Out of my head
Onto a blank page
I'll admit I have had to
Kick them around a bit

After they have landed
Some had to be kicked out
I was sad to see them go
It was like having to fire

Your cousin who just
Wasn't carrying his weight
My additional problem is
That whenever I pick up a page

Of even my revised poetry
The words are still moving
Some are embarrassed
Asking to be replaced

By better more appropriate ones
Some adamantly think that
They should remain
Just as they are

Some are trying to jump
From here
To there
For clarity

So what's holding me back
From better words and arrangements
What's preventing a coup
What's keeping them

From breaking through the lines
And taking over
They know how much work
It was to put them there

They know I am reluctant
To call them back

Without having stronger replacemenets
That's all that's holding me back

Tom J. Mariani

A Short Leap (you would think for a mature audience)

Summer of 1966 I was
Just out of high school
Newspaper web press apprentice
For the San Francisco Chronicle

Working one night I overheard
Several journeymen
Talking about
If they could

Get up enough money
Get the bets up high enough
Buy him a couple of drinks
See if he really could do it

They wanted to talk
This other journeyman into
Proving what
He'd been bragging about

Up until this point
It had only been a rumor
No one had seen him do it
No one believed it could be done

The proper amount of cash
Was quickly raised
Even guys from the third floor
Newsroom white shirts and ties got involved

They put in their share of money
Once the word got around
Posted their bets
I put up my two bucks

We gathered in the basement
Where the one-ton rolls
Of blank newsprint are hoisted
Like fat spindles

Spinning
At a maximum speed
Of thirty-thousand
Continuous copies an hour

When the audience had gathered
The lights in the basement were turned off
Only for a moment
So we could all see the electricity

This journeyman's claim to fame
So he had bragged was

He could put one hand
On a spinning newsprint roll

Build up enough static electricity
To be able at the proper moment
To reach into his pants
With his other hand and

Get an arc of electricity to leap
From the frame
Of the metal press
To the tip of his dick

I was too far back in the crowd
To be an actual eyewitness
It still cost me two bucks
I bet he couldn't do it

Some said it was a trick
He must have had a screwdriver
Or a piece of metal
In his pocket

Some swore it was the real thing
They saw the flash of light
The arc leapt - - - that's tall that counted
There was a little arguing over the bets

He ending up collecting his share of the money
Couldn't be convinced
To do it again for double or nothing
Once was more than enough for me too

Tom J. Mariani

A Single Rose

She wants a poem
Read to her by candlelight
While she sits at a small table
This would be sheer delight

She would like live music too
In the background I suppose
A stark white tablecloth with
A single rose

Don't forget the wine
A white wine '03 or '02
Slightly chilled
Will do

This should be a special poem
One she could say is mine
If she only knew a poet
Regardless of the rhyme

Who will read it to her
Does he need special clothes
Or just a sincere voice and a wine glass
To go with the single rose

Tom J. Mariani

A Striking Pose

There is a a distinct difference
Between her moderately made-up face
Glancing away and her stark white ankles
Flashing at me

Sock-less
Above black canvas shoes
And just below
Fashionable black pant cuffs

It's like that face
Does not match the person
That is using those ankles
To stand near my table

I realize that the sun's rays
Are partly to blame for the difference
The ankles have avoided exposure
To ultra-violet rays and attempted remedies

Of makeup
Moisturizers
Modern exfoliation
Waxing and peels

To what end
What drew my attention
Her face or her ankles
Or the contrast

Addmittedly her face is attractive
What caught my eye
The difference
Striking

Tom J. Mariani

About Bush? They Don't Really Want To Know

Now the #^<*&~> pop-ups
At poemhunter
Are asking me
Do I like President Bush

However they do not
Give me enough room
To respond completely
YES/NO is not near enough

Do I like him to do what
Not close to enough room
For my recommendations
None of which

Poemhunter would print
Anyway

Tom J. Mariani

Aluminum Christmas Tree

Tree? - Schmee
You cant' fool me.
It can clearly be seen!
The damn thing's not even green! !

Tom J. Mariani

An Abecedarian - More Than Meets The Eye

My \$19.95 dictionary
has 22 definitions of the letter 'a, '
so how do I expect you
to understand all the letters

in the rest of this poem?

It's hard enough
for you to know
when I write 'you'
do I mean you or me

or both of us?

Us could be just
the two of us
at the moment;
writer and reader

working together.

You looking over
my invisible shoulder
trying to find out who
and what I'm

writing about.

Unless I'm being
read aloud to
a crowd of others,
all listening for themselves

for me to do something.

He or me could be
my fictional persona
like Chaucer the Pilgrim
opposed to the author-

along for the ride.

He's there to listen and retell the Tales to you.
'Me thynketh it acordant to resoun
To telle yow al the condicioun
Of ech of hem, so it semd me, '

'me' who?

He Me You Hem Us- -
Is this poem
speaking to you?

This is just some of the stuff
you'll have to get through.

Tom J. Mariani

At The Speed of Light, What Word Pops Up?

It's not now called eavesdropping.
No one is right outside,
Standing under your eyes.
Not right now.

Where are they standing,
Standing by, while software
Scans, listens, but does not record,
Until that word is recognized?

Who knows what that word is?
In the fictional movie,
'The Bourne Ultimatum, '
The word was 'Blackbrier.'

That's what popped up the red flags
On all our spies computer screens:
Like someone looked the Old Testament God
In the eye and shouted His name.

That was fiction, right?
One word can't trigger all that?
Excuse me.
There's a knock on my door.

Tom J. Mariani

Barbara's Been a Bad Girl

Barbara's been a bad girl
Someone should have said
Then taken away her candy
And sent her straight to bed

Barbara grew up with people
Who would never scold
Who were always within reach
Without even being told

She starting meeting friends
Just to keep the blues away
Soom they moved in
And were there to stay

We never really knew little Barbara
When we met she'd already been sold
To friends who didn't care
She only wanted more and not to get old

Barbara had a bad time
Always trying to get more
For Barbara's friends came in bottles
From a prescription drug store

Barbara's been a bad girl
Someone shouold have said
Then taken away her pills
And pulled her out of bed

Tom J. Mariani

Barry Bonds Indicted - more news at 11 and ad.inf.

OJ and Barry what else can I say
Court TV has been waiting for this day
Their ratings in 2008 will soar
I can see the crowd hear the roar

Both just trying to get their 'stuff' back
And if you believe that 'Jack'
Do you think Bond's value won't drop
Even if his friends to a plea never cop

Giants picked a good time to let him go
He was no longer the national show
Put on hold the Hall of Fame
Indicted what a shame

Tom J. Mariani

Beyond October

What is it about October
That assures you that
Spring will be back

The weather hints of changes
Leaves are brave enough
One by one

To let go
Taking momentary flight
Abandoning the trees

Making room for new buds
Providing cover for the soil
And food for those below

Lots of work to get ready
For Spring next year
To get through Fall and Winter

Tom J. Mariani

Birds Fly

A little too tall for me
Beautiful flowing hair
Over a tailored jacket

Purse and matching - - - - -

Those long legs
Then she turned
I saw the face with

The same sharp crisp lines
The rest of her had promised

She went walking by - - - - -
Not for me
Just to get by

The strides

The way her jacket swung
Draping her as she walked

It was like watching a bird
Through your shaded window
As it pauses on your lawn

Unless something makes a noise
Then birds fly

Tom J. Mariani

Can You Hook Me Up?

Addiction to fossil fuels
Global warming
Just don't get me started

Tom J. Mariani

Christmas Lesson 2008

Years ago I opened a special Christmas present.
It was from my uncle, sort of a surprise.
All that was inside was a deck of playing cards.
Maybe he hadn't seen my list or knew my size.

When I thanked him anyway he said,
'Do you know how to play
Cards for pushups? '
As he smiled in his way.

Cards for pushups?
It can get pretty hard.
You shuffle, turn one over.
Do what's in the card.

Ace, do 15. Face card, do 10.
Others by the numbers count.
Takes a lot of work for two
As the discards start to mount.

It's not like poker.
No bluff to call.
When it's your turn,
You have to do them all.

Who wins doesn't matter,
As I now explain to my grandson,
'The object is just don't quit
Until the deck is done.'

Tom J. Mariani

COFFEE CHOICES Taken for Granted

Sitting, sipping, at a table outside
Under an awning in a cold light steady rain
Lets more stuff
Happen in my brain

Than if I were warm inside
In a nicer chair;
Acting like
I didn't really care

If others outside
Can't afford to come in.
They're also banned from the bathroom.
Seems like a sin.

I can see the practical side of
Where to sit as I choose.
Guess I should be glad of
A privilege I have yet to lose.

Tom J. Mariani

crowded

Here I am
My trun to
sit at the
table

I've seen it
happening long
ago when
Perry Mason

was still in
black and white
Who knew he was
gay

I've visualized it
as I've read
books about famous
trials

Waiting for
the moment
Listening for
the moment

But there are
No attorney's
leaping to their
feet here

There's barely
enough room
at the table
for me

Attorney takes up part
My investigator takes up part
Then there's our notes
evidence and such

Not much room left
even for the water
the cups the napkins or
me

Tom J. Mariani

Dance, Dance, Dance, 'til You Can Dance No More

As I drove 'cross town today
To get my Holiday shopping under way
With my car radio tuned in
Classic Rock - - let the dance begin

On comes a Don Henley from 1985
- -'All She Wants to Do Is Dance'- -
Up comes the volume
Down comes all four car windows

Take that you hip-hoppers
Wish I had my old speakers
From my '66 Malibu
Then the lyrics struck me

Maybe I've been watchin'
Too many presidential debates
Maybe just too much CNN
Twenty-four hours a day

I have no idea if this is what
Henley was trying to say
But given the state of America's
Foreign and energy policies

Our refusal to sign
The Kyoto Protocol
Ratified by 170 other countries
To reduce greenhouse gases

And our nonplused reaction to that
And the six-year Iraq War

THE IRAQ WAR - -? ? ?
It's our war
Bought and
Paid for

Its cost to date in U.S. dollars
If relevant to you \$469,509,480,910
U.S. troops dead
A very relevant 3,865

I said I'm no sure who Henley
Had on his mind
When he wrote and sang
'All she wants to do is dance'

All I could see in my minds eye
As I drove on
Was my Uncle Sam in a dress
Dancing and wantin' to party

That's what Don's song was saying to me
War's in a Surge mode
Demos first 100 days
Are long gone

'And all she wants to do is dance
Rebels being rebels
Since I don't know when
And all she wants to do is dance

Molotov cocktails the local drink
They make 'em up right
In the kitchen sink
Carzy people walkin' 'round with blood in their eyes

And all she wants to do
is dance, dance, dance'

We're busy getting ready
To dance through the Holidays
Macy's and Wall Mart
Already playing Siren's song

And all we want to do is dance
'Never mind the heat
Comin' off the street'
All we want to do is dance

And make romance
We want to party
How did Don know
He'd make me pull over

Park my car and listen
To his refrain
And suddenly
Not feel like dancing

November 17, 2007

Tom J. Mariani

DETOUR

'And this has made all the difference' from 'The Road Not Taken' by
Robert Frost

Where would they have gone
If they had not driven off that day
Down the Redwood Highway

As far as where, until that morning,
The two southbound lanes
Had been supported by a bridge?

There were no 'DETOUR AHEAD' signs
Except for the slight shaking and
The rhythmic rocking of their car.

'What's that? she asked.
'I think we're getting a flat, '
Was his response until

He realized his headlights
Had stopped seeing
The reflectors and road lines.

Then they both saw
The other side
With only darkness in between.

At 60 mph there seemed nothing
Between where they were and
Where the road began again.

Instantly, she was attempting
To get in the back seat
To protect their children.

He was slamming both feet on the pedals,
Gripping the wheel, fighting for control
Of their VW Bug that was already airborne.

Through his windshield
He saw
What an earthquake can do

To a highway engineer's assumptions of
Friction coefficients and
The constant force of gravity.

Page ones across the world
Sunday morning had pictures
Of where they had landed;

Upside down

Thirty feet below
Where the bridge deck had been.

Front driver's side
Mag wheel
Ripped off.

Re-bar slices
Can-opener like tears
On a grey car door.

The papers tell of little more
About him, his wife
And their three children:

'Twin boys age nine
And a girl
Age four.'

Except that
'They were packed
For a three-day holiday.

Now instead taken
To two local hospitals.
Expected to recover

From various injuries sustained...'
What did that reporter know?
He wasn't there.

If not for this detour,
Where would
The road of life taken them?

Because of it,
Where are they now?
Such is life.

Tom J. Mariani

Discovers' Day October 8,2007

Who?
Just who
authorized

the printer of my
wall calender
to remove Columbus

replacing him with
Discovers' Day?
Who, just who?

When I bought the calender
sure I did not read the fine print.
Didn't think I needed to.

Is it because he and his men
may have brought
smallpox and syphilis

and based on where they landed
didn't really
discover America?

In fact they missed
what they were
sailing for.

It was a shorter route
to the East Indies;
missed by several thousand miles.

We've know this for a long time.
Why take him off
my calender now?

What about the parades-
The Columbus Day Sales-
Am I still going to get 20% off?

No mail today.
Federal employees
Got the day off.

Maybe it's not
Such a big thing?
Do only I miss Columbus?

Tom J. Mariani

'Don't you listen to him Dan...'*

*an old Country Western Tune
sung by Son of the Pioneers

'...he spreads the burying sands
with water-cool-clear-water.'*
Chris Antley: age 34, jockey, dead, O.D.,
Xanax, meth, alcohol, Pasadena, California.

Who hasn't been to the edge of a pool-
Somehow found their back?
How to hang on without hope?
Someone else may know the rule;

Without drugs to help up and down,
Without a record nine 1st place wins in a day
And two Derby wins hanging on him
Like a heavy crown.

Cell phone in hand pacing 'round his pool
Nothing on the surface draws a smile.
Racing endless laps 'round the edge.
Thoroughbred going nowhere all the while.

Tom J. Mariani

Drew Another Blank

California Super Lotto Drawing

October 27 '07

13

20

24

27

33 and

26 for the Mega

I got one stinking number.

Story of my life.

UPDATE 11-10-07

Got two numbers

Still the square root of zilch

Gotta pay

If ya wanna play

I'd still keep writing

If I won

I'd just be able

To afford a more skilled

Editor and proofredr!

Tom J. Mariani

Einstein before his was EINSTEIN

a found poem in
'The Life and Times of Einstein' by Ronald Clark: page 51

'In Berne,
Einstein was another...
unobtrusively trotting
from Gerechtigkeits Square to
the patent office each morning,
usually lunching at his desk,
returning to his lodgings
each evening with
the orthodoxy of the city clerk,
then setting himself down
in a quiet corner to
discover the laws of nature.'

Tom J. Mariani

Evel Knievel' s Last Ride

Not since P.T. Barnum
Was someone able to
Capture our attention
Get us excited about the egress

Now he emerges
Like a heavenly body
From a distant staring point
Listen to the roar of his bike

As he cranks the handle
One last time
I can see him coming
To reach critical speed

In mid-air - - then clearing the last object
I can't see his landing
He shoots in semi-control
Towards the egress

Whatever he had
We all could use a little in our lives
I hope he left some for us
In the sparks of his trail

Tom J. Mariani

Faith in the System

'Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories and criticism. The fore-going generations beheld God and nature face to face; we through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy the original relation to the universe? Why should we not have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs...

Undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable. We must trust in the perfection of the creation so far as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy.'

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Now that we know
For certain two main ways
Of getting exposed

Coetaneous

By merely personally
Coming into contact
With it

Inhalational

Breathing it individually
Into your
Very being

What else
Is there to know

I know we're
All going someday

I choose to go with my faith
And nature coming into direct contact
With my daily life

Breathing deeply
All the days
Of my life

Tom J. Mariani

FIRST LIGHT

First light is not seen
By many these days
Either they're still asleep
Covers over thier head or

On the train or
In cars with all their lights on
Or already
In imporant meetings

Then there are buildings
In the way with other lights on
So it is hard to tell
When dawn first breaks

For those out walking or
Sitting on a bench overlooking the lake
It is a sight that restores
The wonder you had as a child

Makes you believe that you can help
Make it right in this world
For some it's only at this time
With dawn just coming up

Before it gets too bright
And the rest of the town
Is awake going
Their separate ways

In daylight there are winners and losers
People keep score
The light gets brighter
People more intense

And then it is dark again

Tom J. Mariani

First Trip To The Ranch

I had a lot of questions
Duriing my first trip
I'd seen picutres
Heard stories

I had never been

My uncle's car was loaded down
I'm not sure how many he was expecting
We were carrying enough food
To feed them all

First time I had ever been

Off the main highway
Off the last paved county road
It'd been a while since
The last stretch had been graveled

Slow bumps last leg of the trip

The first to meet us
When we got close
Were the staggering pigs
My uncle was smiling big

For the rest of my first trip

He turned to my aunt
In the front seat
I was in the back
Between lots of beer and boxes of cut meat

We were almost there

'Looks like Delbert's been cookin''
Was all he said
I had no idea 'til years later
Not something they discussed

In front of us kids

Ranch had original wood stove
Recent indoor plumbing
Outhouse still stood at the ready
If needed

For the overflow crowd

Found out years later
Why the pigs were as happy
As the rest of the crowd

They - -pigs that is

Were fed the remaing corn mash

Used to cook the shine
Had enough kick left
For them to greet my uncle
With the good news

On my first trip

Turned out to be
A great weekend
Family reunion
Good times

Had by all

Tom J. Mariani

For Members Only -The Ducks Had Better Duck

I know someone has to pay
for all the time we members spend
posting on poemhunter.com but
when will it ever end?

Whenever I log off
I still have to click and click
to rid my screen of ducks.
What's the trick?

Pretty soon I know
I'll blow a fuse;
use a word that rhymes with duck
and then my privileges I'll lose.

I've tried shooting them in the tail.
To no avail.

Then I went for the head;
hoping for better luck, instead

they just keep coming round the bend.
When will it ever end?

What are they trying to sell me?
Spam blocker? Who can ever tell?
I need help shooting enough ducks
to insure their death knell.

Tom J. Mariani

Frost

Frost covers fallen bridges,
As it does the ones that stand.
The whiteness settles everywhere.
It's gone when I touch your hand.

The morning is when we see the frost,
Yet we know it came the night before.
I've been awake, still it has come;
Quiet and cold to our locked door.

We have watched frost go.
Have you ever seen it start,
As it wanders up the gulch
And slinks into our hearts?

Then there's always morning,
Or you suppose there'll always be.
The sun the frost is melting
As we go on, you and me.

We need to talk more when it's forming,
Not just be glad when it's gone,
For, unlike flowers, we seem to wither,
Warmed only by the dawn.

Tom J. Mariani

Generations Apart

She was the only
Person I know
Who painted
Interior window trim
In high heels

Helping us now
Get our house ready
For renters
She has always seemed
Dressed up

Even in an apron

Back when I was five
She pretended to count
The chocolate chips
Warning me that there
Wouldn't be enough

To finish the last batch
If I kept sneaking them
I was there to help
Get her the waxed paper
Grease the cookies sheets

And lick the beaters

I just wish
She hadn't
Scraped the bowl
So very hard
With her wooden spoon

There was hardly
Anything left
For me
When she finally
Handed the bowl over

I could barely
See over the counter back then
To know what she was doing
Buzzing around her kitchen
Her high heels clicking

Tom J. Mariani

God's Gifts

God has many gifts
For us to take when we can
Or like God's first couple
Will we have to say we ran

Out of the Garden
It was too much to take
For the love of wisdom
Dont blame it all on the snake

To know from right and wrong
Or to let go and pray
How do you think you'll answer
When you get asked some day

It won't be easy
No clear wrong or right
You might get asked at morning
Or very late at night

Some of God's gifts come quietly
Like just opening you eyes
Some go thump and
Are really a surprise

Whatever kind it is
It's as kind as it can be
Not all gifts fit or are the
Right color you see

Tom J. Mariani

Great Plans

Overheard a teacher
the other day
Having coffee
Telling a friend

Gave this assignment
to my second graders
You're shipwrecked
on an island

Draw me a picture
then tell me a story
of what you would do
to save yourself

Boys: 'With my sword
I would do this
With my gun
I would do that'

Girls: 'I'd explore
Get some food and flowers
Build a house and
wait to get rescued'

Lots of men around here
Doing this and that
Lots of women too
Waiting to get rescued

Tom J. Mariani

Herb Caen *** a tribute

Herb Caen was a Pulitzer Prize winning columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. He wrote from 1938 to shortly before his death in 1997. He was the reason why most of us who read the Chronicle passed page one and went directly to the second section to see what was really happening. Most of what he wrote was poetry. If only the stereotypers would have set it that way***. They had to get the lines to run unbroken, except for his famous three dots when he shifted subjects, from the left hand edge to the space he shared with the daily Macy's ad. He was a prime example of a quote he used in his column at the end of 1989: 'If you're going to get old you might as well get as old as you can.'

He often romantically looked back and tongue in cheek commented on how things were changing. Let me give you an example from July 1938.

Our mouth slightly ajar,
we stood at Eighth and Market...
watched a woman leap
lightly and gracefully

aboard a moving streetcar,
all the while
smoking a cigaret.
Thus did

all the institutions
of our age
tremble and totter,
thus did

men lose
one of his
'inalienable rights, '
the right to

hop on streetcars
in motion.
We almost
dare not ask-

'What's next? '

[How could he of anticipated shots of young ladies nightclub hopping sans underwear?
]

This next example comes from a column in 1996

EAST of the bay
Berkeley is still
the political correctness
capital of the area-...

a wedding director
at the Berkely City Club

(putting on final touches)
was asked to be sure

to close the front gate
'so the outdoorsmen
can't get in.'
She immediately flashed on

dandies in
safari clothes
driving
Range Rovers,

but noooooope.
In Berserkeleyese
'outdoorsmen' are
the homeless...

(Herb would have invited them in, bought them a drink and gotten another story.)

It was also in Berkeley
that Jean Harris
of Danville
saw a mom

walking down the street
with her small child,
mom wearing a
sweatshirt claiming

'Harvard Graduate School.'
The child
about 4,
was holding a Slinky

and appeared baffled,
asking, Mom,
what does
a Slinky do? '

Replied the Harvard gradmom briskly,
'It takes potential energy
and converts it
to kinetic energy.'

'Uh -oh! '
said the kid,
probably not
for the first time that day.'

(There's more, so much more. His never missed a daily deadline 'til he got as old as he could.]

Tom J. Mariani

HO! HO! HO!

Dolce & Gabbana
Juicy Couture
True Religion
Seven For All Mankind
Apple Bottoms
Air Force 1
Louis Vuitton

If this was on
my ganddaughter's
Christmas list
I would have headed
for a music store

Thrown myself at the mercy
At something with metal fragments
Sticking out of body parts
Me not knowing the differnce between
Blue ray and I-Pod.

I checked twice
Good news none of this stuff
Is on her list
Pays me right for half-listening
To TV's Inside Edition

Or what ever version of a
Fashion new-flash was on
I got the names right
Just the wrong product line
I'd need her sizes for all the above

Santa's even older than me
How does he figure all this stuff out
And still manage to say
As he pulls out of sight
HO! HO! HO! ? ? ? ? ? ? ?

Tom J. Mariani

I Feel So Sub-prime

My next-door neighbor is gone
Two small U-haul trucks
Were parked in their driveway
When I got home Friday

The guy that owned the house
Before them
Was an ass
First thing he did

When he and his wife
Moved in was to convert
Their two car garage to
A kick-boxing studio

Our garage faces the street
Their's faces our property
One day I got home from work
Walking up to my door

I glanced to my left
It seemed as if someone else
Was walking too
At just about my pace

Then like Lucy and Harpo
If you remember that TV scene
From 'I Love...' we both
Stopped and stared at each other

The entire back wall of his garage
Was a glass mirror
Like a ballet studio Glass!
Without the class

His studio had been downtown
In a commercial building
I had read the magnetic signs
On the sides of his SUV

Now his studio faced my front yard
Heavy bag hanging there
All the space was needed
Washer and dryer? ? ?

The had been hooked up
Outside for Christ's sake
Under a tacked-on lean-to
To keep the rain out

This was only the start
Of a rocky relationship

Street parking was taken
By his clients 4 to 11 PM daily

Thursdays were better
That was youth night
Parents dropped them off
Picked them up

But not the wrappings
Plastic bottles aluminum cans
And all the other garbage
The left behind

Planning Board Zoning enforcement
Building Inspector Code enforcement
Public Safety Sanitation Department
All equally useless

So when they sold the house
I was thrilled to say the least
No more cars and ski-boat trailers
Parked on his lawn

I never noticed when
Our new neighbors
Moved in
They were very quiet

Never talked to or even saw him
Saw she and their child
Once or twice and waved
Then came the cars

Five or six parked regularly
Didn't take me long to figure out
This new building code violation
The studio had become a dorm

Their sudden move out
After about two years
Was a foreclosure
I checked the county records

The teaser rate non-verif' loan
Got them in got them out
Even with renters they couldn't
Cover the bump in rate + taxes insurance

It makes me feel sad
I never got to know them
To talk about plans to remove
My two large old maples

That I knew dropped
As many leaves
On ther side
As it did ours

I have no control over
Negative amortization loans
Falling real estate values
I could have helped with the leaves

Tom J. Mariani

I Find Us Between the Lines

I find myself between the lines
Of Marvin Bell's poem
'Prodigal?' in his book
Of poems 'Mars Being Red'

It's like he's welcoming me
Back unconditionally
I'll put his words in brackets
So you can follow along

[I'm off to the front lines in the war to preserve
the privilege of myth-making]
That's me whenever I write
My poetic license tucked in my pants

I have [...the nerve to think
the future and remember the past...]
How does Marvin know how poems
Come to me and want to get back out

I still think he is talking about me
In the last lines of the poem
[...They lived among the heroic
who did not want another life, and if

they erred in creating bigger-than-life characters,
they broke bread with the unspeakable,
and that is worth something.]
In case you are wondering

I think you too the other writers
Are the [heroic/who] also [did not
want another life, ...]
[and that is worth something.]

Tom J. Mariani

I Want The Ducks Back

[Follow up to my poem, The Ducks Had Better Duck]

Where have the ducks gone
I shouldn 't have scared them away
Now to log off poemhunter
I have to see young Michael Jackson every day

Come on guys
It was only a poem
Sure wish you were back
On my screen free to roam

I'd take you back in a second
If I only knew what button to poke
Come on guys
Don't you know how to take a joke

I guess I'll have to accept it
As long as they don't let him age
To see him as he is now
Is a high price to pay for my rage

Tom J. Mariani

In His Day

I don't recall what I saw first
His face of his boots
Both were old and battered
State-issued brown high-tops

One held together
By a thin torn strip
Of bed sheet wrapped and tied
Around the sole and top of the toe

It showed more
Signs of wear
Than the other boot
That seemd much newer

Leading me to believe
They had been acquired
At different times
How did they get mismatched

His face had deep creases
Or age and wear too
Black tight short weave
Receding and graying

This morning he was
Standing in line
Waiting to use one of the two
Open cell common sinks and toilets

They had to serve one-hundred and ten
Prisoners housed on Broadway
The open bunk area for the overflow
In San Quentin's West Block

Standing there in his
Baggy pajama style
Orange top and elastic banded pants
His body was ill defined

As he turned his head
I could see he was missing
A couple of teeth and
His left eye

There was a dark socket
Where his eye once was
The rest of his face
Just looked tired

It was pretty early
Watchinig from my lower bunk

On the ground floor
Of the five tiers of West Block

I had the luxury
In a two-man five foot by
Nine foot cell of
Our own toilet and sink

We didn't have to
Line up early
Before breakfast
To use the common heads

I had forgotten
About the old guy
Until I saw him
Later that day

We were in the exercise yard
He had his orange top off
This old dude still had
Strong muscle definition

No excess steroid
Metal pushing bulk
Like some of the
Younger guys were strutting

In his day
My guess was
He went up to 155
Welter-weight or light heavy

After watching his workout
Of finger-tip inclined push-ups
And shadow boxing
I could imagine

As he walked across the yard
In his mismatched shoes
He could still go
Deep into a ten round match

With most of these guys

Tom J. Mariani

In Our Own Image

You didn't have to have struggled through
Reading Chaucer in Middle English
To understand this poem,
But it would help.

You likewise needn't to have read
An array of Emily, Stephens. Williams,
Sandberg, Bishop, Whitman, Thoreau,
Jeffers, Paz, Bukowski, or all of Frost.

It's not a prerequisite to have
Surfed through MTV, PBS,
The Three Stooges, Lucy, The Great One,
Chicago Hope, Ben Casey and NYPD Blue.

You didn't have to have been at the
Robert Kennedy campaign headquarters
In the San Francisco Fox Plaza
On the night he was shot and died in LA,

Nor in my college cafeteria
Across the room from
Where the Black students hung out
The day after Martin Luther King was killed

To know how I felt when
I turned on my TV 6AM PDT
September 11,2001,
But it would help.

Tom J. Mariani

Is It Only In California?

Is it only in California
That on November 24th
You need sunglasses and
Can wear shorts and a T-shirt

To scrape the frost off
Your car windshield like I did
This morning
Before I went to get coffee

Tom J. Mariani

It Just Keeps Coming

HGTV Extra
US Senator Boxer
Support at sonicnet
U Got Graymail
Publishers Clearing House
Offer Confirmed
Beauty PRODUCTS
Hanes Tshirts
PinkLAPTOP
Leske College Money
JobRecommendations
Plasma TV4 Free
Debt Removers
Classmates
poetnews@news.poet
Stubhub
Advance Your Career
Forclosure Listing
MacAfee
HOUSEKEEPER
Language Learning
Fun Shirts
Camera Deals--

Where does all this crap come from?
It's like trying to swim upstream;
In a fast moving never ending stream.
Or like in one of Al Gore's slow moving inconvenient ones.

Tom J. Mariani

It May Not Seem Fair

She was part
Of what held
This family together

When it didn't want or
Didn't think it needed
To be held

Now she tells me
Of growing up on the ranch
In the early nineteen hundreds

Why their father left
Coming by with money
Putting in a couple days of work

Then heading back out
As the held together
Four young girls and their mother

On a ranch
Needing at least
Two strong men

Just to hold the horses
Horses that were halter broke
Yet still needed to learn

To repon
To the bridles
Givin instructions

They needed
To be taught
But never question way

They would turn
Trot canter pause
Cut gallop or stop short

When they felt
The pull in their mouths
The slap on their flanks

Expected to be saddled
Carry pull
And be ridden

For the rest of
Their lives
Working a ranch

Herding a small
String of beef cattle
And milk cows

Guess he was not ready for that
He drove his six horse team
Trained to haul heavy loads

Logs - railroad ties - or
With high sideboards
Loads of tanbark

The girls had turkeys and pigs
To raise
Cows to milk

Chickens to feed
Kill pluck and clean
Eggs to collect candle and sell

Deer they shot
Needed to be dressed out
Venison jerky seasoned hung to dry

Tall green stalks of corn to grow
Apples to pick and put up
Pots to clean

A garden to tend
Vegetables to sell or barter
For flour salt coffee fabric

Lanterns to trim and light
Clothes to mend and wash by hand
And then hang to dry

All by hand
Without his
He was in town or

Out of town on the road
In the winter he drove
The mail coach

Three day drive north to Eureka
Overnight stops for supper
Fresh horses

After meals for passengers and locals
Playing his fiddle for dancing
Drinks for the driver

The trip in a car now takes
Only about an hour
Up the Redwood Highway

Not a fair race
We don't go by the way of
Briceland Ettersburg

Redway Garberville
Out Bells Springs Road
To pick up and deliver mail

On to Harris Alderpoint Fort Steward
And in between
Laying up overnight

Back to Phillipsville
Through Miranda Meyers Flat
Shively Pepperwood

Stafford Scotia Rio Dell
and Alton before again
Overnight in Fortuna

I have been shown where the coach stop was
Fresh horses more dancing
An early start on to Eureka

She has told me
More stories
As I listened this morning

She tells me of things
From my parents to her grandparents
Living on the South Fork of the Eel River

She has outlived
Her three sisters
She is the last

Now giving me
An explanation of why
Their father left

A wife to run a ranch and raise
Four young daughters by herself
On her mother's family homestead

Tom J. Mariani

Just a Few Things I Don't Like About Writing Poetry

Why do some of my best ideas
Wake me out of a sound sleep
At 2: 06 sometimes 3: 28 AM
Damn green digital numbers

Then I can't find
My beside notebook until
I bump into something
That wakes my wife

By the time I've assured her
There has not been
An attempted break-in
Found the notebook where's the pen

Finally quiet as I can
Get to the bathroom
Turn on the light
Get comfortably seatd

I am sure I have
Forgotten most of the good parts
The ones that remain make little sense
Now that I am fully awake

Another thing

Why is most of the heavy lifting
Done at my end of the process
If you don't think so
You're not the one

Who carries my full wastebasket
Of drafts to our blue recycling can
It's only the paper worth saving
Not what's on them I assure you

Fridays that blue sucker
Has to be rolled to the curb
Later I hear the automated arms
Of the truck straining to lift

Some of my best first tries
As they are unceremoniously
Carted away to be recycled
For someone else's next attempts

(Note to self: Learn to write and revise
Live on the computer
'Do not save' will save trips
To the unvirtual garbage can

I'll find other ways
To get my exercise
Gathering material
To write about

As long as I can get
Enough rest before
Another great idea
Rudely wakes me up)

Tom J. Mariani

Just When I Thought I'd Seen It All

OK I know it's a liitle early
For Christmas poems
But the catalogues have been coming
By mail for weeks

So I'll keep this short
For those of you or
People on your shopping list
Who still have self-winding watches

Wrist that is
That need help getting wound
It's hard to believe
But they have come up with a cure

This machine \$100 to \$200
Holds one or up to four
Wrist watches - - - at last count
I only needed one

If you haven't had enough activity
During the day
To get your watch wound
It will do it for you while you rest

However if you can't get your watch to go
I can't see why you'd need more rest
I cut the advertisement out
So I can look at it

From time to time
And remember when
At 11: 02 - - mail was early that day
I saw it all

Tom J. Mariani

Lady at the Desk Wouldn't Understand

And it comes to this
Him putting back in his teeth
with one hand

Standing back to me
stall door open in the men's
bathroom at the Central Library

This rainy cold morning
he's just bathed
washed his clothes
repacked all he has

This rainy cold morning
I've been trying my hand
updating my resume
preparing for a job interview

I was able to
sleep in a little
shower shave at home
breakfast with my wife

He 's been tring to
keep warm
stay awake and
not get thrown out

Right now he
in the stall
me at a urinal
we're just two guys
taking a piss

=====

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Tom J. Mariani

Learning To Run Errands -with a couple of lines from Billy Collins

from This Much I Do Remember by Billy Collins

'Then all the moments of the past
began to line up behind that moment
and all the moments to come
assembled in front of it in a long row,
giving me reason to believe
that this was the moment I had rescued
from the millions that rush out of sight
into darkness behind the eyes.

Even after I have forgotten what year it is,
my middle name,
and the meaning of money,
I will still carry in my pocket
the small coin of that moment,
minted in the kingdom
that we pass through every day.'

Learning To Run Errands by Tom J. Mariani

My Mother never learned to drive a car
Until she was well into her forties
As a single mother of three
She couldn't of afforded one anyway

Us kids got bounced around
Sometimes living with an Aunt and Uncle
While she had her own apartment and job
In another town seven miles away

Other relatives had rentals
Sometimes we got to stay in one with her
She never did very good on her own
Or with her three marriages

In those days in a small town
We walked most places
Few people used taxis
Our Mom did

She used them to pick up her prescriptions
To take us to the doctor
When he couldn't make a house call
And when she needed a ride somewhere

I was the oldest
I had a bike
I got to run small errands
Picking stuff up cashing checks

One day when we were over at
My Great-grandmother's house
Mom tossed me a quarter
'Run uptown and get me the scandal sheet.'

She knew what she meant
Grandma Mammy and her husband Dave
Knew what she meant
I just went

Hopped on my bike and headed
The six or seven blocks
To the newsstand that
Also sold candy soda and liquor

Left my bike leaning it carefully
Against their large window
So I could keep one eye on it
While I went inside

Walked up to the counter
Dug in my jean's pocket
And asked for the scandal sheet
As I put the quarter on the counter

He didn't even look up at me
Maybe he didn't hear what I said
So I asked again louder
I know he heard me this time

He called over to this wife
She was putting bottles on a shelf
'Come here. You gotta hear this.
Tell her what you want kid.'

Maybe he didn't know
Where in the store they kept them
So for the third time I asked
She couldn't keep from laughing

'Honey, which scandal sheet
Are you looking for? '
I didn't know much about them
Other than that's what my Mom sent me for

I knew they were about movie stars
And poeple with lots of money
I never paid any attention to them
How stupid do they think I am

Now they were both laughing at me

I had heard enough
I took the quarter off the counter
Jammed it back into my pocket

Indignantly pedaled
As fast as I could
All the way back to Grandma's
Not expecting to face more laughter

I wasn't going back
Even after being told
The name of the one
My Mom wanted

I wasn't ever going back
To that store
Never not ever
In my life

They had just lost a sale
I was going to buy a candy bar
With the change
What was so damn funny

Tom J. Mariani

Life is truly a ride

We're all strapped in.
When the doctor slaps your behind,
he's ripping your ticket and
away you go.

As you make each passage
from youth to maturity,
sometimes you put your arms up
and just scream.

Sometimes all you can do is hang on
to the bar in front of you.
It is the ride
that is the thing.

I think the most you can hope for
at the end of life is that
your hair's messed,
you have a smile on your face,

how it got there only you know,
you've used up all you had,
you're out of breath and
you didn't throw up on yourself.

Tom J. Mariani

Like Shooting Stars

I heard him say,
When asked
What it felt like
When depression overcame,

'Like no love left in my heart
I checked other parts of my body
It's no longer there either
I'm not sure when it burned out

It was there once
Felt by the rest of my body
Intensified by proximity
To its intended target

Love generated its own light
Created its own heat
I looked for words to describe it
Landed on shooting stars

A thrill to see
Something special
While flying by
Where do they go

That's the problem
I found out
They aren't going
Indefinitely anywhere

For a short time
We see visible light
Created then
Gone

Small pieces of dust rock ice
Debris from the tail of a passing comet
Ignited by friction visible part a meteor
Just passing through our atmosphere

We only see the light
Meteoroids are what causes it
Not as romantic sounding
As Shooting Stars

If by chance one's unusually large
Over a few kilograms
Some parts will
Survive the burning

What's left
That falls to earth

Some say is
Just a piece of cold rock

What was on the outside
Heated up
Burned up
And is gone

What hits earth
Is now called a meteorite
Different names
For the different stages

Actually the term
Falling in love
Is a pretty accurate metaphor
When compared to shooting stars

Made up of dust rock and ice
Made visible when heated by friction
Then either slams to earth
Or is vaporized.'

That's what he said,
In so many words.

Tom J. Mariani

Looking Back

Her hair is short now
Ted had always liked it long
They had shared so much
Even her name was in their favorite song

She frosted it too
'Grey already?' he tried to smile
It caught in his throat
She was changing more than style

They both were so young
Writing their names in ink
On schoolbook covers seemed permanent.
What did they think - - -

That all the songs of the '60s were true
It seems that The Four Seasons
At 45 rpm
Was the extent of what they knew.

Once they had parted
They tried several times to restart
No matter who he met
A piece of her was in his heart

So much has happened
Over all these years
Does it make any difference
That there once were tears

He couldn't stay friends
Once she'd found another
He had no interest
In being like a brother

His life could only be lived
He would eventually find
If she was out of sight
Surprise - - - she's still on his mind

Tom J. Mariani

Looking for Encouragement In ICU

He's gone
I never saw him go
Surprised that he fell

I thought he would get up
At first he looked like he'd be OK
He was upset that he'd slipped

Confused that the legs hadn't held
The strength that steadied
The foot and braced the legs

Held at the smoker in 1932
When three solid lefts
Couldn't take him down

Held when the Hammond trim saw kicked
Held on the wet rocks of Redwood Creek
When the salmon jumped and were on

Held splitting a second cord of wood
While after loading the first
I thought I needed a break

Now when he needed it most
They didn't hold they gave
Yet he somehow still held on

Over the ledge I could see him there
He was pulling himself up
Or at least I wanted him to

I tried to talk to him
I got his attention
He silently shook his head

The same as when we hunted
When I thought I had a clear shot
And he knew I didn't

He always challenged me
No matter what I did
To be a better shot

'We're not out here to wound
Chase down a revine then
Drag bloodshoot venison through the brush.

We're out here to put meat on the table.'
He also knew when to fish
And where the quail hid

He always encouraged me
To know what I was doing
Before I did it

'Its real important you learn
The difference between your ass
And a hole in the ground.'

Was his way
Of putting it
I knew what he meant

Shaking his head I recognized his signal
I still wanted to help even though
I couldn't have gotten to him anyway

Then he stopped trying
The strength and gruffness were gone
I was mad at him

For the tears in his eyes
For not trying
For knowing more than me

He knew there was no way up
The others calling to him
Were of no use

I knew then what he wanted
To push away from the side
To be over and done with it

He was caught tangled held back
He couldn't even let go
When he wanted to

I looked and he was there
I couldn't help
I didn't want to watch

I looked again
He was gone
I never saw him go

Tom J. Mariani

Lovers Leap

Love is a leap
No matter what they say
Whether it is forever
A season or just a day

For we don't fall in love
Rather we leap at each other
Once we recognize the spark
We think it will never smother

Only after we have leapt
Can we see where we have landed
For some life is more than fair
For others seemingly underhanded

Tom J. Mariani

Made to Feel Welcome

I'm sure Sandra M. Gilbert
The author of her collection
Of poems titled
'ghost volcano'

Had no idea what her poem
'Kissing the Bread'
Would remind me of
When she wrote about

Her mother's habit of
Kissing old bread
Before she threw it away
Sandra found out

'Her mother the Sicilian midwife
taught her, taught all nine, '...

'Non so. You kiss it like
crossing yourself before a crisis, before
the train leaves the station,
before the baby falls,
startled, into a sudden
scorch of air.'

What a description of birth
- -a baby falling startled
into a sudden
scorch of air

My grandmother
Who is now 103
Has told me of her mother
Who was a midwife in Maui

They grew up in the Hawaiian islands
After their parents came
From Puerto Rico speaking
Spanish learning pidgin-Hawaiian

My great-grandmother Vegas
Had other skills too
In addition to being a mid-wife
She could heal the sick and injured

Her blessings combined with
Her homemade remedies
Brought comfort and restoration
Of health and well being

Both were more fragile back then
From childhood mortality

To a variety of fevers boils
Farming injuries violent digestive ailments

She was also with them
When they could no longer fight back
She blessed them and assured them
They would be welcome

They were exposed to much of what
We are now insulated from by
Vaccinations hospitals real doctors
Refrigeration indoor plumbing

However as far as I know
Babies still fall startled
Into a sudden scorch or air
Hopefully into warm welcoming arms

Tom J. Mariani

Malcontent Debris

Why do you think they wear goggles?
To keep their eyeballs in?
The two orbs are not trying to escape.
All they want is a little protection
From the stuff flying at you as you pick up speed.

You don't need the goggles
Quietly sitting writing a poem.
You need them,
Firmly strapped on,
When you're out there;

Collecting the stuff
You'll need to write a poem.

Tom J. Mariani

Man's Best Friend Does What!

[Do these 'found poems' keep finding me or am I finding them. This one leaped off the page and into my lap today via Associated Press from Des Moines, Iowa USA. I am not letting my dog read it!

headline- - - - -] Dog shoots man

A hunter is recovering
after he was shot
in the leg at close
range by his dog,

who stepped on his shotgun
[I presume by accident]
and tripped the trigger,
an official said Tuesday.

James Harris, 37 of Tama
was hit the the calf Saturday,
the opening day of pheasant season,
said Alan Foster,

a spokesman with
the Iowa Department of
Natural Resources.
[how'd he get involved?]

Harris was listed in good condition
Tuesday, officials at
University Hospitals
in Iowan City said.

No one else was hurt,
and the dog
was not injured.
['cause he ran like hell?]

Foster said
no citations
have been issued.
[I would still recommend the mut get a good attorney,]

Tom J. Mariani

NEWS -You don't want to get stopped up

My morning newspaper's late again
If I were desperate for news
Which I am not
I could the internet cruise

From CNN to the London Times
I could click here and there
Get second hand more news
Than I could bear

I want my newspaper in my hands
That is the point you see
To check high school sports
Working on my first cup of coffee

Make sure I'm not listed as an obit'
See what businesses have decided to quit
That's all the news that will fit
'Cause it's time for my AM s____!

Tom J. Mariani

Nighttime Traffic Jam - Un callejon sin salida

I pass my father
In the hall
Several times a night
When I get up to take a piss

I run into my Uncle Mike
Waiting in line
With Grandpa Bill and
My Great-Grandfather Jim Boots

I'm no sooner back in bed
Than I hear them
Lining up again
Crowding my dark hallway

I guess even in death
Your prostrate won't
Let you get
Uninterrupted rest

Tom J. Mariani

NO MANDATORY RHYMES OR REASON

Homer to
Chaucer to
Whitman to
Bukowski et al. to
Me to
You

A poem is where I find it,
Not just what was written
In a different time.

Pieces of a poem are everywhere.
Pick them up, pull them together, write them down
And they call you a poet.

Ignore the pieces you see in person, read or hear;
You've wasted your sight and hearing
And they don't call you at all.

Tom J. Mariani

Norman Mailer 1-31-23 to 11-10-07

I have't had time
To read much
Of his stuff

How did he
Find the time
To write it all

Tom J. Mariani

Not A Pretty Sight

A poem should be a pretty thing
Or that is what I once thought
Really a poem touches you
Where you are and where you are not

As there's different types of touching
There's different types of poems
Some metered some rhymed
Some just a cry

As there's touching when you
Politely just want to get by
Then there's touching when you're
Afraid and think you're going to cry

Of course there's back slapping
Hand holding and warm embrace
Then there's that last touch
Just before the color leaves you face

Tom J. Mariani

Not Designed To Wait In Line at Starbucks

Black hair mane-like
Black shoes socks
Strapped in a vest-like

Over long
Warm dark
Sleeves

Where have I seen
Something like this before
Sensing so much desire to move

Not designed to wait in line
So much more to do
Straining at the ropes

That couldn't hold her
Even if
They wanted to

Where have I seen
Something like this before
Seems barely halter-broke

Next I would expect
To hear
Whinnying

Then the sounds of
A jostled bridal
Metal clicks of a bit

Stamping of polished hooves
Pawing and testing
Of the ground

I'm waiting to see
A subtle shiver
In the shoulders

A quick toss of the head
Flick of an ear
Just before she bolts

Tom J. Mariani

Off Track

He never took me to the track

The sport of kings my ass
It filled up part of his life
That we pretended wasn't there

All that time spent
On the phone
With the racing sheet
His little book

Whatever he thought was coming
Down the final stretch
Never made him a king
Left him uncovered several times
And broke him in the end

What is that magic out there
That makes them stand and yell
Waving their tickets
Grasped firmly in their hands
As the horses make the final turn

Maybe if I had been out there
Standing at the rail
As then ran by - - - -
Close enough to catch
The fire in their eyes - - - -

However he seldom went and
He never did take me to the track

Tom J. Mariani

Out of the Blue A Patch of Green

-****Rousseau alleged to have used
a palette of a hundred and some-odd
different greens
in one painting*****

There was an empty table
Next to mine
She walked by dressed in green
Holding her coffee she took a spare chair
Then sat down her back to me

She got my attention
My guess was
She was not
Encouraging nor
Expecting company

After the green hit me
Came the pleasant smell
Over the roasting coffee
It was like in the cartoons
When the drawing of the scent

Comes under the guy's nose
Lifts him off his seat
He floats across the room
Led by his nose
By the visible wafts

Who knows what scent it was
I suppose there are some
Who can tell and know its name
All I knew
It was pulling on me

Back to the green in the chair
Darker green at the seams
Slacks lighter green
Leather jacket and
Shoes both different green

Tail of a sweater
Below back of the jacket
Damn another darker green
I wish I had names
for all these greens

Ankles are barely showing
A light tan do they still call it hose
A beige I guess
Probably has a better

Brand name I also don't know

I'm writing this down
As fast as I can
I was working on other stuff
But this is too good to forget
Living in the moment observing

I was thinking
This green is going
To be gone soon
I'm almost out of writing paper
To describe anything more

My coffee's getting cold
What's she here for
To be seen
To just drink coffee
Pass the time until

I look up the green is gone
All I'm left with is
A cold cup of coffee
And this
For you to read

Tom J. Mariani

Playing Hurt

Personally I never had
To play that hard
Flag football
Did not require

Taping of wrists ankles ribs
Mouth-pieces knee braces
Post game ice packs
Help getting up

And out of bed
The next morning
Shake it off
Back to practice

Our daughter played basketball
First co-ed Boys/Girls club then
Through her second year
At the local junior college

Class scheduling wasn't easy
Away games post season play-offs
San Francisco Sacramento
Berkeley Modesto

Not easy to get in the classes
Needed for her major
Add twenty-two hours a week
As a grocery store clerk

Now you got
A tough schedule
Playing hurt
No big deal

So she told me
Taped up
Mouth piece in
Ready to play

Now married
Buying their first home
Teaching sixth graders
Still a tough schedule

I remember a phone call
From her from Sac State
A month into
Her junior year

Except for intermurals
She decided not to play

To fit in the classes she needed
Laughing she admitted

'Dad, I never realized
How good it would feel
To wake up without
Something hurting.'

Tom J. Mariani

RAIN

I love the rain
It causes smells to change

Washing as I walk
Urine off the sidewalk

Tom J. Mariani

Recrudescence

Here we go again
We've been here before
No one asked for this
No one requested more

So here we go again
Feels like sliding on ice
No traction No balance
Sure doesn't feel nice

Try to grab on
Looking for something stable
We reach We try to grip
We're not able

There's nothing to tie on to
There's nothing to hold
Once we had each other
No surprise Ice is cold

Tom J. Mariani

Selected to be So Full of Life

Frisky rare white boxer pup
They use to
Put them down

Tom J. Mariani

Sense of Smell

Doesn't matter
if you were hiding
from chores
back at the ranch
in the middle of the orchard

or years later

raking leaves and
the dead ones
from the single tree
in your backyard
after a rain

the smell of apples
is still the same

Tom J. Mariani

Sights and Sounds of Christmas

How do I know
Christmas is near
Signs around our house
Make it very clear

Advent paper windows
Get opened each day
Twenty-five to count
Teaching grandkids to pray

They're more excited by
The piece of candy they find
Such a small prize makes big eyes
It's a joy of a special kind

Each window has a little prayer
To remind why we count each day
There's other things that tell me
Santa too is on his way

When the tree goes up
Home-made decorations are best
Ornaments bought for special days
Make up the rest

Special lights for the Manger
Ceramics fired by great-great-great aunt Vie
Ornaments made in pre-school
Thirty years gone by

Then what they've all waited for
A cloth Snowman my wife made
His bulging belly's a pouch
Filled with candy starts a parade

He hangs by Grandma's chair
Right there on the wall
As soon as they can reach
They want to be this tall

One by one day by day
A piece here a piece there
Some too short figure out
To stand on Grandma's chair

Pretty soon the Snowman's belly
Starts to go flat
No one knows for sure but
Someone always takes care of that

Finally a noise that I hear
A sort of occasional clink

Someone secretly checking for
Christmas cookies in the jar by the sink

Tom J. Mariani

Soccer: My Best Foot Too Far Forward

I have to go back a bit
To tell this story
Freshman year of college
PE classes were mandatory

Somehow each semester
You had to fit one in
To the burden of other classes
You had to carry gym

It was only for an hour
Twice or so a week
Cut too often and
You were up a creek

Hours in registration lines
No on-line to be on yet
Dennis and I checked our schedules
For an open slot that met

Friends for a long time
We were looking for a sport
We could both sign up for
Open field or indoor court

We both had jobs
That made it harder
Had to pay my own way
Parents provided room and board in the barter

We found a day and time
We figured we could meet
A sport we never tried
Soccer to teach us to use our feet

We got all signed up
Then headed to get some eats
'Hey Dennis said, 'Ya know
We're gona need some cleats.'

No clue of the need for shin-guards yet
We'd never seen a game before
Only rule we knew was no hands
Running and kicking was there more

We bought a book on how to play
Split the cost just bought one
Read it all before first class
We were ready to practice and run

That we did ran drills and hills
It's all he'd let us do

'Don't play to get in shape
Get in shape to play on my crew.'

Weeks went by and still no game
We didn't sign up for that
We kicked so many practice balls
I was sure they'd all go flat

Then the day finally came
Pick sides to play and score
I asked for center forward
I was ready for war

Whistle blew I kicked the ball
As far and hard as I could
I mentioned I'd never seen a game
Coach screamed, 'Is your head made of wood? '

Instead of 'pitching it to a mate'
I played it the American way
He had me running extra hills
Before he'd again let me play

He figured the offside rule
Also didn't register with me
I was now a fullback
'How you screw this up we'll see.'

Dennis tells this story
Like it was yesterday
Reminds me I hold the school record
Distance in a kick off to my dismay

Tom J. Mariani

Spent My Youth in an Alley

Went back this weekend out of town
For a family birthday party
To where I spent
Some of my youth

Backing my sister in-law's car
Out of her garage
Into the alley behing her house
Brought back some memories

Drove slowly as I bumped along
Over old potholes
Who's supposed to fill them now
Heavy brush and blackberries on both sides

Ahead of me was a young boy on his bike
He had a bouncing empty wagon forced to follow
Tied with a frayed piece of scrap rope
To the seat post of the bike

Another boy was following
As fast as he could on foot
This was only a couple of blocks
From the alley where I used to play

Alleys are great
Protected from traffic and parent's eyes
Old man Mitchell's dogs would warn us
If anyone was coming

Back then my alley
Had fresh oil and gravel
If the city truck didn't come in time
My grandfather kept the potholes filled

Brought the fill home from work
In the bed of his pickup
Sometimes I'd get to help him shovel
Asked him why he did it

'I'm not paying to get
Your grandmother's car realigned again
How in the hell
Does she find every new pothole? '

Once we were done
I'd get to wash his truck
Sit behind the steering wheel
And pretend

Nothing disappointing when the alley was young
Fresh oil and gravel

All the blackberries you could eat
What more could you want

When I took my sister in-laws car back
The boys were gone
Without them in the alley
It's a dusty shadow ridden place

Tom J. Mariani

Steroids Era and the Mitchell Report

American baseball fans
Did not want to know
How the sausage was being made
How the chicken was choked
How the pig was stuck or
How the lamb was slaughtered
They just wanted a tailgate party

12-14-07

Tom J. Mariani

Striking [now trying to be Haiku too]

Striking is the difference
In the color of her made-up face
And her stark white ankles
That are flashing at me

[original above, below attempt at Haiku with same title as original]

Striking

The difference between
Made up face stark white
Ankles flashing at me

[So, how did I do with Haiku?]

Tom J. Mariani

SURPRISE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

[With my most sincere apologies to Clement Clarke Moore]

Twas a couple of days before Christmas
And all through our house
Wrapping supplies were still scattered
When my wife first saw the mouse

I was dozing watching TV
When I hear her query
'What's that running across the floor? '
Her eyes showing signs of fear and fury

Then I saw it too and hoped it was
Heading out on his way back
It was a mouse for sure
Fury light brown with eyes coal black

I jumped to my feet
To see what to do
Could I be fast enough to catch him
Or just hit him with my shoe

I scared him all right
He again ran across the floor
Hid behind our presents
Instead of going out the door

Help was on the way
My son handed me a broom
My wife standing in her chair
Watching from the other room

Our daughter on her cell phone
Also seemed full of fright
I heard her asking a friend
If she could go there to spend the night

Then the mouse was gone
Fast as a shot
At least that's what I told my wife
I showed her the spot

'See the bottom of the new door
where the the rug used to be
That's where he went out.'
Sounded convincing to me

She made me check all the rooms
Even close up the chimney flue blockikng any crack
I thought better and didn't ask
How Santa was going to get in with his sack

Finally she went to bed
I was soon to follow
I'm sure she knew my promise of
'No mouse for Christmas.' was hollow

Tom J. Mariani

Taking Care Of Business

Just got back from L.A.
I thought I had nothing to fear,
'Til warned while renting a car
About getting bumped in my rear.

'Don't stop for anybody.
Don't even slow down.
Don't try to look back.'
I'm supposed to ignore this clown?

But that's what the warning said.
Do I look like a dope?
They offered me a convertible.
No. I'll take a bullet proof model, I hoped.

So off I drove,
Brave as can be,
Not realizing the rent-a-car map
Was on the passenger seat for all to see.

I didn't get lost.
Nowhere safe to ask if I stopped.
Got my work done and
Back on the plane I hopped.

Now safe at home,
It's easy to say;
With its smog, carjackers and freeways,
I love L.A.

Tom J. Mariani

Thank God For Horses That Talk To Me

My wife takes most words literally where they fall
She does not understand my poems at all
She tolerates the time I spend with them
'Long as I don't ask her what she thinks of 'em

She is more like our daughter
Who at age ten indignantly
Handed me back 'Black Beauty'
'I'm not reading this.

Horses don't talk.'
Thank God for my poetic license
And all the horses that
Keep talking to me

Tom J. Mariani

Thank God You Don't Have To Be An Ophthalmologist To Write Poetry

It doesn't fall apart
just because
I don't know.

Yellow doesn't stop
being yellow just because
I'm not sure I know

anything about
why the eye sees
different colors.

Anononymous

Tom J. Mariani

The Lamp

Writing poetry is like rubbing an old lamp.

At first all you're trying to do is get
the dust off, see what you've got a hold of and
what the lamp is made of.

Once the smoke starts to rise and the Genie
begins to appear, you sense the magic
without knowing what direction it will take you,
or the reader.

Tom J. Mariani

The Rest of Our Vacation In LA and San Diego

You know I didn't want to be
The cause for our need for Imodeum D
Since I displayed the symptoms first
I'll tak the blame for finding the curse

I could have brought it with me
Or caught it after we landed
Months planning our vacation
Getting sick seemed underhanded

We didn't take the Tijuana shopping tour
Montezuma found us anyway
Just because Cortez kicked his butt
Is no reason to ruin our day

Even with the unwanted wake-up call
We survived with medication the Saturday mobs
Venice Beach and Hollwood made us glad
We knew we could go home to real jobs

Beverly Hill and La Jolla made us envious
The airline flight from SF made you panic
The Del Coronado made us want to return without Montezuma
For a vacation more romantic

Looking back our vacation was fun
But restful not
Half our time sight-seeing
The rest sitting on the pot

Tom J. Mariani

THERESIENSTAD

If you search there
With today's high-tech tools
You will find the effects there
In ovens there that were his final stop

Somewhere there
Is enough of a sample
To test with modern equipment
For proof he with others ended there

From a sample of dust in pile there
Maybe still buried in a trench
Maybe blown away by now
Since 1943 is a long time

Long enough to forget George Pick ended there
The man who in 1912 caused Eiestein
To consider absolute differential calculus
Which got General Relativity unstuck

Eienstein - a Jew was welcomed
In England Germany America
George Pick - a Jew too
Got stuffed into a freight rail car to Theresienstad

We've left him there
We allowed the cause that took him there
We should never forget the effect
We should never forget George Pick

Tom J. Mariani

Things I Find When I Clean

Halloween has marked the day
-rest of The Holidays are on the way

Clear some room it's been requested
For out-of-towners to be nested

They only stay over night
Then as soon as it's bright

We'll be off to The City by The Bay
Favorite spot of mine I'll say

Things I find when I clean
Things for years I haven't seen

Stacks of books to move
I can get rid of some I'll prove

I throw thoughts onto what I can find
Written on scraps the contents of my mind

Then folded between pages
Of books I haven't seen in ages

Things that came out of my head
Written while sitting on a rented bed

In The City late at night
Under a single light

On guest letterhead envelopes my notes
Of things that mattered important quotes

Also maps and an old restaurant ad
Reminds me of being very glad

As do the books I have to clear
Going to a book sale I fear

No room for anything new
Unless I'm brave enough to recycle a few

It's like-
Parting with friends
Even ones heavy with dust
-back to my notes

Folded maps stolen menus
A parking ticket paid I hope
Even a room key/card
A borrowed bookmark I forget to return

All now in a small pile
After the old books are cleaned
Of stuff that that would only confuse
New owners that will have to
Cope with my margin notes
My guides of where to look
For related stuff my reactions

-But I disgress-

My book shelves were sagging
No room for the books on the floor
Soon overnight guests will be coming
Thanksgiving and shopping trips
From friends and family up North
Looking for a place to stay
Overnight

When the traffic is light
We're forty-five minutes
To the Golden Gate Bridge
Waive at walkers stretch our necks
Gawk at all the sailboats
Sliding across The Bay
They're day-tripping too

Our car has it's own crew
Each ready to unfurl
Catch whatever wind is up
It's hard to hold our vessel
On the Waldo Grade approach
They're so anxious to join the fleet
Anxious to throw anchor at shops diners
In their favorite spot

Staying on course takes all I got
I've also thought of being 746 feet up
Above the water in a tower of the bridge
I can feel the pull on my keel
Wanting to join the boats
Out on the water looking up
That's also where I want to be

On my way out to sea
Wind pulling or pushing
I don't care
Along for the ride
I would like that view too
Instead of looking down at them
To be able to look up at the Bridge-

Taking time to find reasons

To make new notes
Find new books to refill
I'll be seeing things
To write about-

Tourists at the railing
Looking down at all the boats
From the deck of The Bridge
While it carries their weight
Supporting too our rolling vessel
Letting us cruise on
Imagining
While on our way
To The City

Tom J. Mariani

This Is No Fish Story

We had been up and down Redwood Creek
For what seemed to me to be all day
Watching my grandfather fish for salmon
We started at the mouth of the river

Hiked over sand rocks and slippery green moss
The only reason I was there was
The fried chicken and potato salad
My grandmother made the night before

Lunch seemed so far away
My grandfather was out of sight
He had worked his way upstream
When we heard him yell 'FISH ON! '

My grandmother who had been hanging back with me
Left me in the sand
I had to move fast to catch up
Moving around large pieces of driftwood

He had certainly hooked something
His rod bending if half then straightening
As he let line out
With the reel's drag on

I knew how to fish
I just didn't like to
I had no patience
I wasn't like bird hunting

If I got bored bird hunting
When I was by myself
With just my dog
I could take a shot anyway

Just for practice
To get the dog used to the noise
Because I had no patience
At the age of twelve

I had never seen so much line out before
He kept backing further up the wide beach
It looked to me as if the fish knew the way
And was headed back to the ocean

Hook in his mouth
My guess was he was no longer
In the mood for spawning
He had my grandfather on

Nothing personal on either side
My grandfather wanted to land the salmon

The salmon it appeared wanted
My grandfather in the water

This primal tug of war
Went on for some time
The salmon tried everything
It tried going behind submerged trees

It would take a run
Straight at the beach
My grandfather reeling in the slack
As fast as he could

The salmon would then jump high
Doubling back away yanking on the line
Trying to dislodge the hook
Or snap the line (he'd been on before)

They were both getting tired
My grandfather timed the next
Pull on his fishing rod
With the jump of the salmon

Too close to shore this time
The beast was on the beach in front of me
My grandfather was still reeling in line
He knew it wasn't landed yet

He was hollering for my grandmother
To grab a piece of driftwood
To club the monster
Who was glaring at me with one eye

His other eye was in the sand
My grandfather's shining metal lure
Stuck out of a bloody mouth
Gills were grasping for oxygen in dry air

I swear I saw in that eye the reflection
Of my grandmother running
A hunk of driftwood in hand
The eye saw it too

With one last flop like a large wrestler
Just before the count of three
He went up into the air
Snapped the line hit the water and was gone

I'm not sure what pound test the line was
Whatever it was it wasn't enough
My grandfather's favorite lure
With his hand-tied leader

Were following their catch
As fast as they could
Not knowing it was they
That had been caught

Tom J. Mariani

This One Got Selected- - -So Full of Life

Frisky rare white boxer
They use to
Put them down

Tom J. Mariani

Thought Frost Could Not Surprise Me

Robert Frost is one of the ones
That got me started
When the only poems I would read
Had to be assigned

'Read pages 21 to 28 and
on Monday be prepared
to discuss compare and contrast.'
Yeah - yeah more homework

Thank God Robert was in there
Somewhere between
Pages 21 to 28
I don't recall which one grabbed me

But he had me looking for more
On my own nothing due by Friday
We talked about doubt and
Dealing with death 'OUT, OUT-'

This was before I met Macbeth
Robert was talking to me
Not down at me
I thought I knew him

I've invited him to family funerals
'Reluctance' got him a ticket
To my great-grandmother's
'Bravado' to her daughter's

'Devotion' for my father
'Never Again Would Bird's
Song Be The Same' shared
With my mother aunts in chorus

Today he surprised me
Found some humor in there
That I had read over before
I tripped over his cow

'...IN APPLE TIME
As a very young youngster
I was at our family ranch
When it had cattle and apples

Part of my job
Was to keep them apart
Robert shows in this poem
He knew why better than I

While she the cow
May scorn 'a pasture

withering to the root.'
He knows what happens

When as he describes
'Her face is flecked with pomace and she drools
A cider syrup. Having tasted fruit.'
Don't look for Adam and Eve

Although they may have been on his mind
Get out of the way when 'She leaves'
the apples 'bitten when she has to fly.'
AKA The green apple dirties

That's what my great-grandmother
Called the affliction when I had eaten
Too many free apples off the trees
AKA The back door trots

Quickest way to the outhouse
It was more important
And not as funny when
A cow would get into the orchard

As Robert ends his poem
'She bellows on a knoll against the sky.
Her udder shrivels and the milk goes dry'
If it's taken me this long to get this

What hope is there for generations hence
Whoes apples all have bar codes on each one
In season they are not free
They are going to overthink this poem

Tom J. Mariani

Two Found Poems in 'For Whom the Bell Tolls'

These two short passages meet the criteria that Frost set for poetry:

1. a pattern of sound
2. a dramatic event
3. the art of saying one thing and meaning one thing more, at least one

'I believe
that I could walk up
to the mill and
knock on the door and

I would be welcome
except that they have orders
to challenge all travelers
and ask to see their papers.

It is only orders
that come between us.
Those men
are not fascists.

I call them so, but
they are not.
They are poor men,
as we are.'

'...he is finished
and as ended
as a boar
that has been altered.

...when the altering
has been accomplished
and the squealing
is over

you cast
the two stones away
and the boar,
that is a boar no longer,

goes snouting
and rooting
up to them
and eats them.'

Tom J. Mariani

Understanding Prison Signs

One long loud signal bell
Or several short sharp whistle blasts
Tell you to stay sitting if your are.
Standing, sit on the floor 'til

Your hear the signal that it's over.
The signs on the walls make it clear;
'Warning Shoits Will Not
Be Fired' in here.

Tom J. Mariani

Veteran's Day USA 2007

At age 18
My Dad was somewhere
In the South Pacific
Flying in the darkness
As a tailgunner in WW II

At age 18
I was in college
Working part-time
At a job
He got me

Saving some money
For my first car
Borrowing his
To date girls
And think about what's next

Thanks Dad

Tom J. Mariani

Vox Clara

This here's his assignment
Solitary confinement
He doesn't feel great
Being ward of the State
In his cell
Ya know he's mad as hell
But he ain't goin' down
For bein' no clown
He's a soldier
State says he's a holder
Ward of the State
'Les he takes the bait
Givin' up no one
It'll never be done
He's a soldier
May never get older
Say he's full of hate
Got that straight
Used a gun
Made a short run
He's a soldier
Couldn't be bolder
If he popped a cap in you
They'd put dirt top you
As a soldier
Couldn't be colder
Still ward of the State
Don't feel great
He is a soldier

Tom J. Mariani

WARNING! Watch What You Wrap For Christmas

a.k.a. The Untold Cinderella Story

Santa PLEEZE!
I asked you to send them
an expensive pair of these.

Instead, I guess you chose,
to send 'em both
a mismatched pair of those.

I got 'em the right sizes you see.
Now you've screwed it up and
it ends up all on me.

I'll have some fast talking to do,
how my girlfriend got a size 6 left
and a size 8 right shoe.

Same style my wife got
a size 8 left and 6 right.
Santa do you want me shot?

Then, just to tighten the screw,
I heard you got
the cards mixed up too.

When you dropped 'em off
I know it was late at night.

Santa ya gotta help me out.
Ya got me in a New Year's fight.

[Dedicated to the memory of my father
Tom J. Mariani Sr.
and his ways with women]

Tom J. Mariani

What Have They Done To The San Francisco Bay?

What have they done to my Bay
It's yours too you should know
What's been done didn't all happen
Wednesday November 7,2007

The Bay has been shrinking for years
The edges keep getting filled and built on
There's parts best not to get too close to
During low tides - - it stinks

What stinks could be
The effluent that's flowed and flowed in - -
Could be thousands of car tires
And larger machine parts

Know someone gone missing - -
They could be stuck there too
Along with
God knows what

Incoming and outgoing tides
Can clean up just so much
What has been allowed
To be added is a crime

Tides were not intended to flush
Unlimited human waste
Add to that heavy fog
A heavily loaded container ship

A single walled hull
Built for weight and fuel economy
Now that is just too ironic
I hoped they saved enough

To pay for all this
The Cosco Busan has only added
Fifty-eight thousand gallons of bunker oil
To a much larger problem

footnote: by David Helvarg, President of Blue Frontier Campaign (bluefront.org and the author of '50 Ways to Save the Ocean

'We build our homes in fire zones; we move millions of tons of goods and fuel through marine sanctuaries; we continue to burn a product that, used as directed, overheats our planet.'

Tom J. Mariani

Where Ali Learned to Dance

A Found Poem

'Willie Pastrano,
a light heavyweight
champion in the 1960's
and the man

who taught
Muhammad Ali
to dance in the ring,
is dead at age 62.

Nicknamed 'Willie the Wisp, '
Pastrano had a record
of 63-13-8, with
14 knockouts,

fighting
light heavyweights
and heavyweights
in his prime.

Pastrano had fought
77 times before winning
the light heavyweight
title... in 1963.

He lost the crown
when he was stopped
by Jose Torres
on March 30, 1965.

Pastrano then began
to abuse drugs and alcohol,
nearly dying
of a heroin overdose.

He eventually
straightened his life out
and returned to
New Orleans,

where he dabbled
in boxing and
lived on Social Security
disability checks.

Ali, when still
a raw amateur
named Cassius Clay,
saw Pastrano

box on television.
Later, Ali showed up
at the gym
in Louisville, Ky.,

where Pastrano was working
and waited and waited
for two hours
for a chance to spar with him.

'Muhammad loved him.
He called him
Sweet Willie P.'
trainer Angelo Dundee said.

'He learned from him,
but
he loved him
as a friend first.'

Tom J. Mariani

Who's To Say?

Read in the paper today
That it's genetic
If either of your parents
Suffered from
Depression and/or addiction

You are also likely

It's not always only the environment
Can no longer blame it on just that
It's in the blood
As they used to say

Actually it's in the brain
Messages misfiring
Serotonin levels
Out of balance

They think

They don't know
They're trying to be
More current and
Scientifically correct

But what does science know
Nothing except what a bunch
Of people sitting around
In white lab coats say

They probably had parents
Depressed and addicted too

footnote: William Styron 'Darkness Visible A Memoir of Madness'
'I shall never learn what 'caused' my depression, as no one will ever learn about their own. To be able to do so will likely forever prove to be an impossibility, so complex are the intermingled factors of abnormal chemistry, behavior and genetics.'

Tom J. Mariani

Why Does The Summer of 1939 Sound Like Now?

Found Poem about the 1939 World's Fair in New York

from 'Learning to Fly' by Mary Lee Settle

Chapter 2: THE LAST GRAND SUMMER

[TJM - -prior to formal declaration of WW II Sptember 1,1939]

The World's Fair
from the Great White Way-
where rides
and the freaks
and the Aquacade were-
to the grand
temples to American industry,
promised a future
no one belived in.
The buildings were,
in the words
and fashion of the time,
streamlined.
Their exteriors were
softened
into graceful curves
as if they were
in a high wind,
taking off into
some promised land,
and those of us
who knew
it wasn't true
tended to
huddle together.

The interiors
of those temporary buildings
that looked so solid
were in constant movement-
mechanical marching
of cows and railroads
cars and electronic promises,
pioneers and robots and
tumbles, falls, veils of
water rushed toward
that overused,
ephemeral tomorrow.
And we knew it,
we all knew it.

Tom J. Mariani

Why There's Three Chairs

The first question
You're asked
When you arrive is

What do you declare
It's not like customs
About what you are carrying

The guards have other ways
For checking for that
Without asking

The guards want to know
For your protection
And theirs

What race do you declare
What are your gang affiliations
Do you need protective custody

Your race decides a lot for you
Decides who they'll house you with
Determines when

You'll be locked down
Allowed on the Yard
If you need an escort

It all depends
On your answer
To that first question

Yes they'll get around
To asking you if you want to harm yourself
Or others

What meds you're on
Do you hear voices
But above all race matters

For your protection
To minimize the potential
Of fights in a two man cell

The guards try
To match you up
The best they can

With someone you can tolerate
Locked in a five by nine-foot cell
Twenty-two hours a day

Outside the cells
By the guards' station
You can see the three chairs

Behind each chair
Bolted to the wall
Is a locked metal box

They all contain identical
Hair-cutting supplies
Seperate but equal

The first box is painted black
The second box red
The third white

The contents and the corresponding
Barber chairs are for Blacks
Hispanics/Others and Whites

And only for Black
Hispanic/Other and White
Barbers

Make no mistakes
The inmates enforce the rules
The unwritten rules

Tom J. Mariani

Working Out of a Corner Office

I thought I started out strong
After taking many body blows
My guard began to drop

It felt like - -my head being snapped back
I keep moving while holding on
Waiting for the bell

Once seated in my corner
My cut man
Goes to work

Cotton swabs and alum
Attempting to stem the red flow
From above my right eye

He presses on my face
With a piece of ice-cold steel
Trying to keep the swelling down

My manager is moving around
In front of me waving an ice-bag
Replaying his advice from all my fights

The crowd has their opinions too
If I could turn and challenge them
To step inside the ring

That would get them
To back off
That and standing up and spitting

Water and blood in their direction
Into a bucket that sits on the apron
Near the ringside seats

Instead my mouthpiece is slid back in
Past swollen lips while I wait in my corner
For the bell that will start the next round

=====
[I dont' usually make comments on my poems. That's up to the readers to do. However, I've heard from so many readers that can't get past the controlling image of this poem; boxing. I wrote this poem long ago. Long before I saw the movie, 'Michael Clayton.' For some of the other facets to work for the reader of this poem, I have two suggestions: 1) it's out on DVD now so you can rent the movie 'Micheal Clayton.' Think about the character Arthur working out of a corner office, and 2) like any poem, my title is trying to give you a hint of what direction the poem is going to take. a) metaphor of 'working out' - - trying to take care of yourself and b) the stress, grind and responsibility of working in middle or upper business managemnt.

I put this after the end of my poem. I don't want to spoil it for a first time reader. I hope they got, on their own; that this poem is not just about boxing. The same way that Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is not about the cruelty to an Albatross, nor is Virginia Woolf's 'The Death of the Moth' about lepidopterology.]

Tom J. Mariani

World War II Lessons That We're Still Fighting

Summer of 1966
I had been working
Since I turned eighteen
As an apprentice pressman

It was summertime in San Francisco
I got to work full time so in the Fall
I could afford to work part-time
And go to college

My dad had been
A newspaper pressman
Since he returned home
From WW II in the Pacific

He got me my job at the Chronicle
That was how you got union jobs
You had to know someone
Who was already working there

That's why no Blacks were in our union
None worked upstairs either
To report there were none
Working on the presses downstairs

My dad was only seventeen
When he and his buddies
Signed up for the Navy
Right after Pearl Harbor

His graduation was in North Carolina
Learning how to be a tail-gunner
Getting ready to ship out and find out
What the wide white line was for

Painted down the middle of the floor
Of the hall where the band played loud
While young men danced with women
Most would never see again

The local civilians thought
Concessions were being made
By even allowing them
In the building

But my dad saw firsthand
They knew their place
One side of the dance floor
Restrooms bar and buffet tables

Where for Whites Only
Sailors Waves nurses and

Local white females
Waiting to dance and be held

The other side of the line
Not to be crossed
Its restrooms bar and separate buffet
Were for the Blacks

They all danced
To the same music
Only careful not to cross
That wide white painted line

Summer of 1966
We danced in Golden Gate Park
Silly us - - - Did we think we had erased
That wide white dividing line

Tom J. Mariani

You Can't Hide It All

The hair can be dyed
Textured and cut
The face can be made up
The rest nipped and tucked

However worn dry slightly
Cracked heels of feet striking
Out of the back of
Fashionable sling- back sandals

Do not lie

Tom J. Mariani