John F. McCullagh
- poems -

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My influences are Browning, Service, Donne, Thomas Grey, E.A. Poe and Shakespeare.
The newcomers killed my woman,
Ransacked my cave and killed my child.
My brother and I had been out hunting,
The only reason we’re still alive.

We noticed first as we drew closer
The sacred fire had gone out.
We dropped our catch and sniffed the air—
When I smelled blood I grabbed my axe.

My spirit dropped, my heart was saddened
My woman and my child lay dead
The newcomers had speared the baby
A club caved in my woman’s head.

My brother took the child to bury
I built a rock cairn for my mate
I stroked her matted hair in sadness
I stoked the fire of my hate.

From outside I heard my brother
Bellowing his battle cry
Four newcomers were attacking
I grabbed my spear and let it fly.

My aim was true, my man was gutted
My brother crushed another’s skull.
The other two ran short on courage
They fled as we stood side by side.

We too must flee, the caves’ unsafe—
And they’ll be back in force besides
We looked back at the cave in sadness
As we bid our home good bye

The ashes in our cave are cooling
Throughout Europa its’ the same
So many of my people dying
Who will tend the sacred flame?

John F. McCullagh
Just a simple scrap of paper, stained with his blood, dried red,
It was picked up by a passer-by. It's author newly dead.
The victims in the towers had been pulverized by stone.
And now could be identified by DNA alone.
For about a decade after, his note was saved, unread,
The M.E. was too busy, bones took precedence instead.

Reflecting pools, the well of souls, are where the towers stood.
There's a garden of remembrance and that's all well and good.
His widow and his daughters hung his picture on the wall.
It was like a wound reopened when they finally got the call.

She thought he had died quickly; the second plane had struck his floor.
He worked in the South Tower way up high on eighty four.
"We identified this by the blood, it matched his DNA."
She stared numbly at the note he wrote that sad September day.

You may view the blood stained note and the message that he wrote
In the Nine Eleven museum in Manhattan
When he'd spent the time we're given,
paper saved him from oblivion.
Now his tragic end will never be forgotten.

John F. McCullagh
To The People Of Texas & All Americans In The World: 

The blank parchment is wordlessly taunting me
Shall I write out a Will? Or a Plea?
The troops of Santa Anna surround us,
Should I surrender unconditionally?
No! I’ve replied with the cannon!
I’m determined to here make my Stand.
My life and my honor for Texas,
My beloved adopted homeland.
Their red flag of no quarter is flying.
So far I have not lost a man.
Ceaseless is their cannonading,
"Victory or Death!" - My command.

John F. McCullagh
(it Was)   A Very Good Year.

My minds image of my Ellen
Is like a rose preserved from time.
Or like a treasured bottle
from a vintage year for wine.

I am haunted by her memory-
How our fingers intertwined.
The fragrance of her body
as I held it close to mine.

I was Mars and you were Venus
your head rested on my chest.
A summer rain began to fall
persuading us to dress.

Now just the shadow of your smile
Brings tears to a dry place.
Funny how my heart can race
Within the ghost of your embrace.
.

You are unchanging, therefore perfect
Your aspect is divine.
I believe our year was vintage-
for love, if not for wine.

(Fifth poem in the Ellen cycle, A summer picnic at Planting Fields, Arboretum in 1979. It was a picnic, marked by a brief rain, where we shared a bottle of Mouton Rothschild)
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John F. McCullagh
“sorry Charlie”

A Dentist from Weehawken was feeling miserably;
Depressed, down in the mouth, you know how that can be.
Walt thought salt air would do him good and so he went to sea.
He chartered a large fishing boat and paid a hefty fee.
They set a course for Georges Bank where clam and cod abound.
For centuries this place has been a fertile fishing ground.
With bated breath and baited hook, Walter set his line.
He’d catch some rays and have some beers and have a real good time.
But Fate had other plans for him, things took a darker turn.
Those who fish for sport, not food, are beasts as he’d soon learn.
A tug upon his line foretold the battle to take place
It nearly pulled him from his chair and so began the chase.
What monster he had on his line, the dentist didn’t know.
He played the creature skillfully as it thrashed to and fro.
The massive tuna breached the waves and landed with a splat,
It wore coke bottle glasses and a red Greek fishing hat.
Walt, the dentist, looked upon his catch and was aghast
As “Charlie, the Star-Kist tuna, gasped and breathed his last.
The dentist took a “selfie” that was seen the world around.
“Perhaps I’ll mount him on my wall” Walt said thoughtlessly.
Little did he know what this would cost him personally.

These days Walt is in hiding in his Northern Jersey town.
His patients have all left him and he closed his office down.
His car has four slashed tires, there’s graffiti on his walls.
He can’t even go on Facebook, he’s been unfriended by them all.
So take a lesson from Walt’s fate as he waits extradition
Never kill beasts that have names or you’ll wind up in Prison.

John F. McCullagh
02-03-59, That Day The Music Died

"That'll be the day" he sang, the boy the crowd adored.
Then he took flight from that place to go play for the Lord.

The singers died on impact, they lay still where they were found
The twisted wreckage of their plane lay scattered all around;
the wicked whistle of the wind; a hollow, mocking sound.

Three minstrels dead, the papers said, the day after they went down.
Other, lesser, voices mourned as we placed them in the ground.

Do you recall where you were when you heard the news and cried?
The sad news of Buddy Holly's fate, the day the music died.

John F. McCullagh
50 Years On

Twelve thirty five
three shots ring out.
The Presidents been hit.
He's dying, no doubt.
A ghost stares down
at the Motorcade.
Another clutches his throat
as lifesblood is splayed.
Their drama plays out
at Dealy Plaza
Without the blood
or the Dura mater.
A great Man murdered,
A vision gone
November twenty Second
Fifty Years on

John F. McCullagh
The call went out
It meant one thing.
Death in the line of duty

Women keen
and Grown men weep
at the loss of youth and beauty.

The empty locker,
The ownerless gear,
silence that is a presence.

Brave Liam lies dead.
The fireman’s friend
Pity the parents their loss

The ownerless toys,
The master less pets,
How to make sense of it all?

John F. McCullagh
A Brewed Awakening

4 A.M.- it’s much too early
It’s no surprise I’m feeling surly.
It’s cold outside and lacking light.
It feels like the middle of the night!
(When you’ve been out late and had a few
Mondays are no friend to you.)
Villainous clock that chirps and chimes
I’ll hit your snooze button one more time.
Its cold, and someone stole the covers
I reach for them as for a lover.
Alas, my larcenous spouse has taken them
I guess I’m in for a brewed awakening.

John F. McCullagh
A Candle In The Window

A candle in the window is a warm and welcome sign
of an accommodating spirit with a thirst for the Divine.
Our ancestors lit candles in the Ireland of our past
To let a persecuted Padre know that there he could say Mass.
Our native tongue was under siege and in time was nearly lost
as the Crown tried to grind Ireland down no matter what the cost.
We are a charming people, sweet and witty are our ways,
stubborn in our faith that man is most uncommon clay.
So on this coming Christmas Eve before the feast begins
Put a candle in the window and welcome Jesus in.

John F. McCullagh
A Certain Star

The night is still and cold and clear
As Christmas Day draws ever near.
I hear the church bells start to ring
And hear angelic Choirs sing:

“Peace on Earth, Good will to men,
This day a Savior is born for them.”
A child is born to be a King,
This is the essential thing.”

A tree adorned with lights and glitter
in two weeks’ time will just be litter,
Wrapping paper, ripped and torn,
will be in landfills before too long.

Concentrate upon the star,
The guiding light to who we are.
Never, ever condescend
To live in darkness
once again

John F. McCullagh
A Child Of Then

I lay down on my living room floor
Convinced that the world would end.
A crisis off Cuba with missiles in route.
Yes, I am a Child of Then.

A lady in pink with blood on her dress.
A President shot in the head
I remember where I was exactly that day
Yes, I am a Child of Then.

Police battle Blacks, Watts is in flames
Protests rage on without end.
King is dead at the hand of a bigoted man
Yes, I am a Child of Then.

Camelots heir sought to bind up the wounds
Then Sirhan Sirhan shot him dead.
Bobby bled out on the kitchen tiled floor
Yes, I am a Child of Then.

Asian girl running, naked, on a dirt country road.
A Viet Cong man shot in the head
Fifty Eight Thousand names on a wall
Yes, I am a Child of Then.

John F. McCullagh
A Cry In The Night

A Cry in the Night

From the courtyard far below
We all heard the woman scream.
Faces at the windows saw
The masked assailant stalk his prey.

“Stop that”, someone shouted down.
but none went to the woman’s aide.
Not even did we call police
while she still might have been saved.

She screamed for help but no help came,
Her hands bled from defensive wounds.
Her killer made a final thrust
And she folded in a swoon.

He grabbed her purse which was the prize
And left her in the courtyard, dead
Her name was Kitty Genovese
A pretty girl, the tabloids said.

A moment in a City’s life-
Not a source of civic pride
Glad she was not a child of mine
Did you watch the night that Kitty died?

Source:
the events of the night of March 13, 1964

John F. McCullagh
A Cup Of Tea

A cup of tea, some soda bread,
Would you take some milk and sugar, friend?
Sit here by the fireside
And share with me the daylights end.

You show your photos with just pride
This one of your eldest, a blushing bride
Wasn’t it just yesterday
she was a toddler hard at play?

Here are prints of Bob and Fred
Your two boys, both Ginger heads
Bob’s at University
My Henry used to work with Fred..

I had a letter yesterday
From our friend, Mary, at Black Bay
Her son is fighting in Iraq
She counts the days until he’s back

Its’ hard for me now Henry’s gone-
my children grown and moved away.
Filling moments isn’t easy
II’m grateful that you came today.

Remember when we all were young
and danced at céili’s all night long
We gave our parents anxious times
staying out sometimes till dawn..

A cup of tea, some soda bread,
Have it with a bit of jam.
Let the tea steep and grow strong
Night is coming soon anon.

John F. McCullagh
A Dark Day Without Rain

The General stood looking in the mirror
Perfectly attired, Cap a Pied.
He turned to me and said
'We must not delay this, Mister Marshall.
This bitter cup that fate has handed me'
I handed him his sword in silence.
We'd be fighting in the hills
Were it up to me,
but even I knew that our men
were starving, Surrounded,
there could be no victory.

Traveler was mounted in an instant
Few looked finer on a horse than
Our Robert Lee.
Under flag of truce we rode
to the McLean House,
there to await the modern Ulysses.

Grant rode up dressed in a Sergent's uniform,
mud splattered,
His shoulder straps the only hint
of rank.
He looked more like the man
who had been beaten
Than General Lee who had to play that part.
He took Lee's white gloved hand, offered in greeting
both men's faces etched with suffering, I saw.
They reminisced about their other meeting,
when both served Scott in the Mexican War.
Then General Lee asked Grant
to state terms of surrender.
They sat down and, in short order,
ended the unpleasantness of war.

The Victor was generous to the Vanquished:
No Rebel would be tried, or lose their home.
The men permitted to retain their side arms
Rations fed to men of skin and bone.
We'd Stack the drums and cannon in the field
Give our parole despite our internal pain
There were troops still in the field but it was over
April Ninth, a dark day without rain.

John F. McCullagh
A Death In Greenwich Village

It was windy that night, all those questioned agreed, when the woman was struck by some falling debris. It was here on West 12th Street, at the corner of Seventh, by the condo they’re building on the site of Saint Vincent’s. A section of plywood had chanced to fall, driving “Tina” Nguyen head first into a wall. She fell to the pavement and she struck her head. They rushed her to Bellevue, but she was already dead. Was it chance? Was it fate? Was it some Divine plan? Her death was so random, so hard to understand. We walk these same streets, so I think you’ll agree It could have been you. It might have been me.

John F. McCullagh
A Farewell To Brittany

We cannot, must not, judge your act.
We didn't share your pain.
You've left this life on your own terms-
How many wish the same?
We weep for that which might have been;
a happy heart and home.
When that proved to be impossible,
the choice was yours alone.
For those of us who linger here
In doubt and groundless fears,
We respect your heart's decision
and the life within your years.

x

John F. McCullagh
A Flower From My Mom

It's Mother's day today and flowers, in their bright array, 
are popular gifts to give to Mom on this her special day. 
While they still thrive the air is sweet; redolent of both rain and Sun. 
Eventually their beauty fades though a Mother's beauty never does. 
They are a small enough return for the gift of a Mother's love. 
They are symbol and remembrance too, for those whose Mothers rest in peace. 
In their petals, soft like her cheek, lurk remembered fragrances 
Stirring memories which make us weep

When I was a child of five I bought a flower for my mom. 
It was a fragile little thing but I was glad that she seemed charmed. 
The years of our shared lives flew fast, like decades of her rosary. 
She is resting now beside my Dad; for now and all eternity. 
Some photographs and books are all I have of what she left to me. 
Imagine how I felt today when I found this in her breviary- 
Pressed petals of that long dead rose; a cherished gift from her young son. 
It made a grown man weep for words left unsaid and deeds left undone.

John F. McCullagh
A Fool For Love

I was then but middle-aged, established in my world.
She was a young ingenue, a lithe and lovely girl.
she knew about the ring I wore, the promise it contained,
but we were both the worse for drink and passions were inflamed.
I should have left here at her door, my lusts I should have tamed.

Her perfume was enticing, unlike what my Lucy wore.
I stepped back to admire when her chemise hit the floor.
To hold a warm girl in my arms; to kiss those lips of flame.
I felt my youth restored to me when she whispered my name.

Her mystic rose was delicate; its subtle nectar sweet.
She raised her hips to meet my lips, the conquest was complete.
We both were lost in pleasure, her fingers urged me on.
We surrendered to our yearnings, all inhibitions gone.

Some say that Hell is a fiery pit with fierce unquenchable flames.
Others say its lined with ice and the cold drives you insane.
For me Hell was a woman scorned and a co-respondent named.
I was crucified in the press; such is the cost of fame.

I am older, wiser now. I never touch a drop.
See, if you never drink the first no one need tell you stop.
I have been a fool for Love but I will not pretend
that I don't miss her passionate kiss I'll never have again.

John F. McCullagh
A Gift Of Time?

James Holmes awaited news of his fate. (Would his madness be held to mitigate?

His terrible sin, his awful crimes; Life or Death, How to decide?)
What is Justice for multiple homicides?
He murdered twelve and injured more; Now what would the verdict hold in store?

A lethal injection, A Lover’s pinch, was that the outcome he devoutly wished?
Else he would get the world and time to contemplate his awful crimes.
He’d be Locked away from the world of men; never to be free again.
Haunted by souls he condemned to death; who had cursed him with their dying breath.

Life, the jury has decreed, as punishment for his awful deed.

He'll be locked in the prison of his mind; an awful penance is this gift of time.

John F. McCullagh
A Hero Of The City

When evil intrudes into our day
So many are silent or turn away.
They back away, stare at the ground
Scarcely a hero can be found.
It was on the "L' train yesterday;
A man was beating on his child
A woman had the nerve to say
"Stop what you're doing
For it is vile."
You've heard the tale-
You know the rest
He turned on her
He ripped her dress
He lashed out and knocked her down
Our heroine lay there on the ground.
A heroine bloodied but unbowed.
New York would be a better town
If more like her would stand their ground
For evil cannot stand the Sun.
We need more heroes, but here was one.

John F. McCullagh
A Knife In The Heart

His victim lay helplessly there on the table.
He picked up the blade with the handle of sable.

With no thought of mercy
He hefted the knife
And cut out the heart of that innocent life.

It would do for a side dish
A garnish for meat.
An artichoke heart
Is a healthy taste treat.

John F. McCullagh
A Life In The Theater

There are faces in the darkness
There to see and not be seen.

We are players acting out
“A Midsummer night’s Dream”

I am a minor player-
An inconsequential part

Think of me as of a wall
Between two loving hearts

I've learned my choreography
And know my lines by heart.

I hear the music playing-
the thing’s about to start.

Stage love is unending

and best described as blind.

No pair ending up estranged-
the happy ever kind-
The people go home happy
By car or cab or train
And wake up the next morning
To find that nothing’s changed.

John F. McCullagh
She had been through so much,
Still, the cancer had spread
Now six weeks into treatment
She's confined to her bed;

My wife's been a smoker
since she turned sixteen.
Through the years we were married
and the years in between.

Now though she breathes
like a fish brought to shore.
her long term addiction
had her craving one more.

Who am I to judge her
or deny her last wish.
She is not getting better,
I've no heart to resist.

I gave her the smokes
she had long put away
I gave her the lighter
and sought out her ash tray.

A tremendous explosion ripped
through our first floor.
It indeed had proved fatal
her request for one more.

on purpose or accident
I can't judge her intent
in choosing to smoke
in her oxygen tent.

John F. McCullagh
A Little Bit Of Brooklyn

A little bit of Brooklyn fell
From out the sky one day-
And landed in Corona
Near the subway and the bay

And when the mayor saw it
Sure it looked so green and fair
He said suppose we fund it-
And condemn the junkyards there

So they issued us some tax free bonds
To make the grandstands grow
And charged too much to sit in them
even up in the last row

'It has a brick rotunda
   Makes one think of Ebbets Field
And once they sold the naming rights,
They called it... 'Citifield! '

John F. McCullagh
A Loss Like No Other

I saw her just the other day,
But, not knowing what to say, I turned away.
For she has lost her only son,
off fighting in the war.
A bootless war that lingers on
Like a chancre sore.
There are others like her;
Gold stars in windows shine-
For brave boys brought home in boxes
for “no one’s left behind. “
There’s no word that refers to her
Who has lost her only child.
A remnant who lingers here
the last one of her line.
I’ve seen her tend his graveside
like she once made his childhood bed.
She keeps the flowers watered,
trims the grass above his head.
In her Living room, a folded flag
A grateful nation’s gift
To remind her of one she loved so
Whose death left her bereft.

John F. McCullagh
A Man For All Seasons

The sunlight is too bright for me-
I was in prison for so long.

My trial, a show staged by the Court,
condemned before I spoke a word.

I thought, by silence, to preserve
my family from Penury.

I counted not on Richard Rich-
compensed to commit perjury.

“Lieutenant, help me up these stairs
I’ll find my own way down, I think.”

Though weak, I stand and face the crowd
Some bravely bless me as I speak.

“I die loyal servant to my king
But I give primacy to God.”

(I would not take the proffered oath
That would make Henry more than Lord)

“I give my life for Holy Church
like Fisher did before me.”

Catherine is my rightful Queen
Anne Boleyn, King’s plaything..

“Axe man; spare my beard I pray-
my “Treason’s” not its doing.”

By your blade is More made less?
No, More serves God in heaven.

To those who caused his Martyrdom
The blade was less forgiving.
John F. McCullagh
A Member Of The Corps

He was small for a Marine,
The dying boy there in the bed.
Three times he'd fought off cancer
but now, inside his head,
a serious infection
would claim his life instead.

Cody Green was only twelve.  
All his life he'd loved the Corps. 
They made him a navigator, 
The insignia he wore. 
An honorary soldier 
A marine in time of war.

The crises was upon him.  
He would not win this fight 
A fellow member of the Corps 
Stood honor guard all night

There would be a flag draped coffin 
for this member of the Corps. 
Cody Green, a Young Marine 
A Marine in time of war..

John F. McCullagh
A Memorial For Mary

My Altar is a table set upon a naked stage.
While waiting for the memorial to begin
I watch from the wings as students and alumni
In clots of twos and threes come shuffling in.

Poor Mary lived just nineteen years.
A dark depression did her in.
She was my student, I knew her well;
These tears I shed are genuine.

Ours is not an age of Faith;
Our thoughts and prayers are platitudes.
I look out upon the faces of her friends
who've forgotten the beatitudes.

Her body rests in the cold hard ground,
interred two weeks ago today.
Some claim she is an angel now.
So I do hope but who can say?

What then can I say to salve these souls
who have forgotten how to pray?
What cold comfort is my funereal black
on this bitter grey December day?

Her youth and beauty have been overthrown;
Persephone has been by Pluto wed.
How wise he was, the poet, who observed
The folly of being comforted.

John F. McCullagh
A Misplaced Minute

The holiday makes glad the heart
Of every child who knows their part.
But for adults like you and me
May cause distress, perhaps ennui.

The days I hoped would never end,
The time I thought I’d spend with friends.
Lost opportunities litter my path
Then vanish as quickly as a laugh.

Not so, the hours spent alone
 Dreadful, slow, they bore on home.
With a palpable sense of waste-
They leave me with a bitter taste.

Minds wander, memories fade
Thus happy moments are mislaid.
Just be grateful even thus
Pain and regret are turned to dust.

If I again could be a child-
But no, time doesn’t backward run.
Accept my time for what it is-
Moments’ sweetness on my tongue.

John F. McCullagh
A Murder In Chatham

St. Patrick’s Church was sparsely filled
For Friday morning mass
The seniors getting restless-
the clock read  a quarter past.

It wasn’t like the pastor
to leave them waiting there.
Father Hinds was not the kind
to miss the call to prayer.

The usher and the janitor
Together went next door
They both recoiled in horror
at the blood upon the Floor.

The police came with the coroner
To the Parrish rectory door
And saw Jose the Janitor
Try CPR once more.

Chatham is a quiet town
A place when families thrive
And father was the Sheppard
to guide them through their lives.

It didn’t take police much time
to find who did the deed
as Jose’s cell phone records
had placed him at the scene.

The murder knife recovered
The crime confessed at last
The priest had caught him in a lie
about crimes in his past.

The people came together
And filled St. Patrick’s seats  
To send the Father to his rest  
And give their hearts some peace.

A narrative poem about the murder of Father Ed Hinds, Pastor of St. Patrick's church in Chatham on Thursday 10/21/2009

John F. McCullagh
A Note On Father's Day

My son passed on in 95'; his cause of death was AIDS. We hadn't spoken for some years; we were then estranged. I could not understand the love he had for other men. Still, I admit my heart was broken that his life was at an end.

Decades passed and I grew grayer, ready for my final bow. I wish I'd been a better Dad; knowing what I know now. Then it came, the letter, one he'd written long ago. A card he's sent for Father's day some thirty years ago.

It filled my heart with gladness to read of his love for me. If he only knew I loved him too. We might have both been free. Life cannot give him back to me, nor all my tears erase, Still I pray this was a sign he's in a better place.

John F. McCullagh
A horse to Ride, A sword to wield,
an ocean of grass to tame.
The Seventh was out in the field
to make George Custer’s name.

The village stretched before them,
Custer split his force in three.
Reno’s men struck from the south
and were taking casualties.

Did Custer reach the river
before the native’s struck?
This hero of the Civil war
had just run out of luck.

Major. Reno sensed the trap and fled
And found a place to stand
Benteen brought his men to Reno
to lend a helping hand.

A horse to Ride, A sword to wield
An ocean of grass to tame
The Seventh was out in the field
to make George Custer’s name.

Out upon the greasy grass
George tried to make a stand
Two hundred men surrounded
There was a breakdown in command.

Outnumbered and surrounded
Some men simply broke and ran
But death was not to be denied,
Their blood fed thirsty sand.

Custer, mortally wounded,
with a bullet near his heart.
did not live to see the rest.  
His troopers hacked apart.

The position held by Reno  
And commanded by Benteen  
survived several furious assaults  
before the natives fled the scene.

Relieved by General Terry’s force,  
They sought their fallen ones-  
The bodies hacked and naked,  
decomposing in the sun.

No horse to Ride, No sword to wield,  
an ocean of grass untamed.  
The Seventh lay out in the field  
That was the cost of fame.

John F. McCullagh
A Piece Of Heaven

It was by accident I found it, in a box of odds and ends;
A short eight millimeter film my father made back when.
It's Grandpa's house up on the lake. I'd been just three or four.
The flickering images speak to me as from a distant shore.
The people who I knew and loved, who long since have passed on,
were shown as I remembered them from a time long since gone.
It is, of course, a silent reel and the colors fade a bit
but memories fill in the gaps as I remember it.
It was a perfect summer's day, out fishing on the lake.
I imagine sunshine on my face as I view that scenic take.
My grandpa was a kindly man and, with infinite care,
He taught this headstrong little one about how we should share.
I've had my share of tragedy, life isn't always kind,
but I know this made me smile, this serendipitous find.
Soon I must get back to work, resolving Mom' estate.
But I've found a piece of Heaven here; all else will have to wait

John F. McCullagh
A Pint At Christmas

This is a Christmas time request
to join in a good deed.
I’m Giving a pint at Christmastime
To strangers who are in need.

So raise your sleeve and not your glass
Don’t let blood banks run dry!
The pint you give might help one live
Who otherwise might die.

Then afterwards we’ll raise a glass,
two heroes, you and I.
We must replenish after all
And not let the well run dry.

John F. McCullagh
A Prayer For Thanksgiving, 2010

A Prayer for Thanksgiving, 2010

Lord, we humbly thank you
For the feast you set before us.
The harvest has been fruitful,
And you preserved us to enjoy it.

The year has been a challenge
for our oldest and our dearest,
but baby Julia's lately come
with her toothless smiles to cheer us.

Our wives and daughters have prepared
a great Thanks Giving feast.
The places set, the wines been poured.
I'll gain five pounds at least
We give thanks that we're together.
Far too often we are not.
With the children off in college
And work keeping us apart.

Inspire us with charity
Towards those who need help living
-Remind us of the best of us
one missing from this table
Who earned Your thanks by giving
all that she was able.

John F. McCullagh
A Rose Amidst The Thorns

Roses in profusion
bloomed along our garden wall.
They were both red and yellow-
tea hybrids, I recall.
There were thorns too,
as I well knew,
standing guard among the blooms.

A careless creature soon would learn
to give the rose wide berth
An agony of thorns awaits
the careless of the earth.
Yet thorns permit the bees to come
and pollen to transpose.
and, if careful, they'll admit
my own scent seeking nose

I think thorns serve their purpose well
else roses would be trampled
The thorns are roses' guardians
and not inconsequential.
Without a thorn, the rose, forlorn,
is destined for the ashes.

John F. McCullagh
A Rose Without A Thorn

I knew a rose without a thorn, 

The rarest bloom that grows
She blossomed, briefly, beautifully,
Right there beneath my nose.

I fear that I will never see

Another bloom as fair,
Except in memory, ever green,
Her fragrance lingers there

John F. McCullagh
A Snowflake’s Revenge

My brother died upon a tongue
But now I with my legions come
Pelting down like frosty rain
with drifts up to your window pane.

Your women to the market race
As if food won’t be seen again
And you make your Home Depot run
As if some salt will stop my friends

We clog your walks and bury cars
And all your transportation snarl
With Blizzard force my winds do blow
blinding those who walk below.

No force of Sanitation will
chase us hence from whence we spill
Nor shall your shovels pitiful
Make much dent in what we will.
Your plans all ruined- Quel Domage!

Stay inside for all I care

Venture out to shovel me

And freeze your butt off if you dare..

John F. McCullagh
A Streetcar Named De$hire

Detroit is a mess, eighteen billion in debt
But you can't stop a loser from a double down bet.
The transit she has runs deep in the red
Half her acreage is vacant and her tax base has fled.
So now they plan a streetcar, the M-1 light rail
They boldly go forward with a plan doomed to fail.
Detroit's busted budget is out of control
Their schools are the worst, Half the town's on the dole.
But if we build a streetcar then all will be well?
More cash down the rat hole! Don't ask and don't tell.
Three billion dollars it's projected to cost-
half for the rail line and half for the Boss.

John F. McCullagh
A Study In Scarlett

A wistful sadness in your eyes
Says all you need to say..
Your heart desires privacy
Now that love has gone away.

A legendary beauty-
A star of screen and stage
You’ve always been before us
since a young and tender age.

Mother Nature was most generous-
Most think you live in clover-
Blonde hair, blue eyes, the perfect skin
And cups that runneth over.

Life can serve up curves besides
The curves you proudly own.
To make you think, like Garbo,
that you want to be alone.

True, there will be other loves
and other roles to play.
Today you act the stoic
Now that love has gone away

John F. McCullagh
A Tenuous Tenor

He sang a tenor’s part-
No more a tenor really
Though aging cords may gamely try
It was disaster- nearly.

He lost the lyric line.
Poor fellow –must be blasted
Too much North Fork wine
Or maybe he’s just past it.

A singer lost for words
is clearly up against it.
A staircase that’s collapsing
can only be descended.

Some forty years or more have past
Since he sang at their Wedding
A rose cheeked boy with strong clear tones
He was, then, worth the hearing.
With time his talent vanishes
He cannot compensate
For lyrics he’s forgotten
And notes he cannot make.

His hopes to leave on a better note
Then disappeared completely,
Only a swan- at its last-
can be sure to sing more sweetly.

John F. McCullagh
A Victim Of Homicide

I stumble forward in a daze
with shackles on my wrists and feet.
The room is cold and very bright
As I approach my final sleep.
I see the gurney waiting there
It bears the aspect of a cross
For me to stretch my arms out wide
Embracing what my sins have cost.
Behind the one way mirrors stand
the next of kin to all my crimes.
They wait there to see justice done.
They count down to the end of time.
I feel the needles subtle pinch
as liquid poison finds a vein.
As Icy coldness creeps towards my heart
the savior to my darkness came

John F. McCullagh
A Visit To The Beauty Pallor

Most days of the year a visit here
would involve a rinse blow and trim,
but on Halloween it's a whole different scene
As the Queens of the night wander in.
Our regular staff has this day off-
It helps keep their heads in the zone.
To help "Jason" and "Freddie" get themselves ready
We've beauticians from good funeral homes,
If you wish to appear as a zombie or Ghoul
These girls will help get your "Freak" on
By the time you stagger up out of your chair
You'll look like you're long dead and gone.
With a wicked gleam they will paint your bod green-
You may fear it won't ever come off.
Some bolts on your neck and, oh what the heck,
You can tell folks you're Boris Karloff.
If a ghost is your quest you will be most impressed
You will look just like Lizzie the Queen
It's quite the parade as they head out our door
To march in the West village scene.
"You look Boo-tiful dears", I say to all here
As we all celebrate Halloween.

John F. McCullagh
A Weapon Of Mass Destruction- 06/28/1914

Just six inches long and not hard to conceal,
I examine the pistol that began the Great War.
It's been put on display in the British Museum
And it must be regarding with awe.

"The Archduke must die!" Mister Princip declared,
as he emptied this gun at close range.
"Sophie, live for our children." The dying Duke begged,
But sadly his pleas were in vain.

Great armies mobilized, by August, guns roared
For Four years the slaughter went on
Till all the King's horses and all the King's men
and even the Kings, too, were gone.

Now news comes from Turkey of a murderous deed;
a Russian Ambassador slain.
Once more a pistol was used for the deed.
How much can this poor Globe sustain?

John F. McCullagh
A White Carnation

For many years he'd traveled far,
a merchantman by trade.
His Mom passed on while he was gone-
she sleeps there in the glade.
Now he is home with tales to tell
of his trek on the Ocean Blue
but the one face he longed most to see
is not there to tell them to.
So he sat down on his duffel bag
beside her well tended grave,
and spoke his stories of the sea
when others might have prayed.
He left a white carnation there
upon her bed of clay.
It was well watered by the tears
he shed for her that day.
He said his last good byes to us
and turned back for the sea and the shore;
He'd search for peace on Neptune's deep
for Home wasn't home anymore.

John F. McCullagh
A Woman Well Lived

Her skin may bear some marks
from the Sun she has faced,
but she still holds a beauty
that time can't erase.
The blonde hair of her youth
now is silver and gold,
but her scent is alluring
and she's tempting to hold.
She's a Woman well Lived.
She is sixty years old.
Her life isn't over,
despite what she's been told.
Her breasts are translucent.
Blue veined and full.
A hand full and more
and enjoyable still.
Her kisses still sweet
as the day we first met.
The time, passing quickly,
gave no cause for regret.
So come lie with me, Love,
er the evening is gone.
Don't be the least shy
we can leave the lights on.

John F. McCullagh
A Woman, Taken In Adultery

A widow took a stranger to her bed.  
This woman was denounced before the law.  
She numbly stood and heard her sentence read.  
Though I suspect she knew her fate before.

She knelt, silent, in the center of the square.  
No neighbor wished to be the first to stone.  
At length, the foreign fighters of Isis  
Grabbed the rocks and drove the lesson home.

The body, dressed in black, was dragged away.  
a streak of red remained the only sign  
of the price the law had made a woman pay  
for the fleeting pleasure of a lovers arms.

But what of he who joined her in her sin?  
He did not share her fate who shared her bed-  
a &quot;cooperating witness&quot; for the law.  
Strangely just the women wind up dead.

John F. McCullagh
A Year Ago Today, The 9/11 Poem

It was a year ago today
Twin towers built of steel and stone
Still stood beside the water’s edge
To greet the final morning dawn

It was a year ago today
Some Saudi’s bent on suicide
Commandeered a flock of planes
And human reason crucified

It was a year ago today
That wingless angels sought to fly
From the upper stories strewn with glass
To flee the fires of hell they tried

It was a year ago today
When dust and darkness reigned at noon
As glaring spotlights pierced the night
Stone by stone we searched the ruins

The year has past as it always must
3000 people now but dust
But should you come to walk Ground Zero
Tread lightly on the stuff of heroes.

John F. McCullagh
Across The Sea Of Time

Across the sea of time
In a cockleshell I float.
A sea of storms that threaten
my spar and tiny boat.
The fast receding continent
Is my past I’ve left behind.
The friends and family long gone
seen only in my mind.
The shore ahead a mystery
A strange and new found land
Will flights of angels guard my steps?
Or will Dragons try my hand?

John F. McCullagh
Adam

I was one of thirty embryos,  
but I alone survive.  
I am the Savior sibling  
Without which my sister dies.

We started out in vitro-  
Men in white coats then decided  
That I would be implanted,  
all the others left to die.

Mollie, my older sister,  
carries a defective gene:  
Excess hemoglobin  
caused anemia extreme.

From my umbilicus they took stem cells  
And Mollie’s blood was cleaned.  
They say I am a miracle.  
To most, that’s how it seems.

But what about the twenty nine  
Who died that she might live?  
Did they not have a human right  
As good as mine to live?

Why could they not be cherished  
by our mother from the start?  
Instead of summoned into being  
as a little girl’s spare parts.

I love my sister Mollie,  
And she is awfully fond of me.  
I’m not just her little brother-  
I’m her insurance policy.

John F. McCullagh
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John F. McCullagh
Addicted To Distraction

The soft blue glow of his smartphone screen
Attracts him like a lover.
He looks intently at the "feed"; and snap chats with the others.
He photographs his dinner plate and
shares it with the web.
He plays no sports, he stays inside
He plays VR instead.
His neck is permanently bent
from looking at the screen.
He's not much for conversation.
He's a solitary teen.
He's getting fat and growing soft
from long stretches of inaction.
He needs an intervention-
He's addicted to distraction.

John F. McCullagh
Addicted To Love?

Lillian Caine was the young lady’s name.
She was a romantic at heart.
She was painfully thin with a wart on her chin,
and stood tall at the end of the line.
Little Jim Coke was a short little bloke,
A cherub like smile his chief charm
He soon won her heart, they were seldom apart,
They looked like a “10” arm in arm.
Lillian thought they were destined to wed;
Her dear little Jim thought the same.
When they wed they became,
by their hyphenated last name,
Mr. & Mrs. Coke-Caine

John F. McCullagh
Aeolian Harp

I came with the wind,
with the wind I will go.
It has always been thus
And will ever be so.
For the wind is his breath
And the Rain is her tears
The sunlight, their glory,
And the darkness, their fears.
More worship the Sunrise,
It seems so to me,
than the fiery Sunset
As it sinks in the sea.
Yet, in truth, both are equal
In pure majesty.

John F. McCullagh
Again

It had been some years
since you and I
had shared any stage and time
but here we are
in another's garden.
Strands of silver now showcase
your still pensive lovely face
You played Rosalind with me
in William's Arden.
Our theater borne romance
never really had much chance.
I know I hurt you
and I seek your pardon.
Never again to know that touch
which we both enjoyed so much-
It's true with time and age
positions harden.
Still, you tempted, and I ate,
and with that we sealed our fate.
That was long ago and
in another Garden.

John F. McCullagh
Again?

Twelve years; has it been as long as that?
I’m conscious of the grey that streaks my hair.
She, however, seems just as I remember
As the day before that day she wasn’t there.
There are no ties that bind me to this woman.
There are no banns that tie her to this man.
This was, of course, an accidental meeting.
Her leaving cut me far too deep to care.
Yet her eyes search mine as if to question
If an ember in the ashes smolders ther

John F. McCullagh
Against The Wind

Who can stand against the wind
That Tornado Ally blows?
What is within a people,
Who naught but hardship knows?
A force like an atomic bomb
Has visited again-
The great Plains own apocalypse
in the roaring of the wind

Moore is, more or less, destroyed.
No stone upon a stone.
Amidst the wreckage, children’s toys,
That none will claim to own.

I have witnessed as the fires burn
among the fallen walls.
as first responders sift through stones
in search of living souls.
A playground, where no children laugh,
Now a bleeding open sore..
Mothers, weeping for their children,
Because they are no more..

John F. McCullagh
Al Gore Doesn’t Recycle

“Use it up, wear it out
Make it do- or do without-”
My mother was a child
of the Depression.

Her carbon footprints were quite small
As she never drove at all
She didn’t fly
Or like to air condition.

Al Gore, on the other hand,
Just pretends to be the man.
He heats his house with oil
And it’s a mansion.

He drives an S.U.V.
When he comes to lecture me
On inconvenient truths
Of earths’ condition.

It’s the scandal of the age
This environmental sage
Uses private jets
to get to his appointments.

I’m awaiting Tipper’s book
About this eco crook
It’s a tell all titled:
Al Gore won’t Recycle

John F. McCullagh
Alcoholics Unanimous

ALCOHOLICS UNANIMOUS

The head of blended Spirits
saw his future looking bleak.
The case sales for Scotch Whiskey
trended downward week to week

What was the cause of this decline?
Why were sales weak as water?
To find out he relied upon
his party loving daughters.

When they reported back to him
He nearly died from shock:
Folks weren’t merely “buying down”
because they were in hock.

Instead they met in basement clubs
And sat on folding chairs
Pouring out their troubles
To such strangers as were there.

They told him of a program
That sounded like a cult:
Twelve steps to salvation-
Start with putting down the cup.

They said the former customers
Had mentors they could call
To talk them out of drinking
if they longed for alcohol.

The head of blended spirits
Hatched a bold and daring plan-
ALCOHOLICS UNANIMOUS
“The Friends of Old Grand Dad”

They’d meet in clubs and taverns
As you might surmise
And sponsored “beer pong” tournaments
with Whiskey as the prize.

The new club had its mentors too
Conveniently right in town
To talk folks into drinking
And to join them in a round.

John F. McCullagh
Aletheia

Aletheia looked into my eyes
and I could not avoid her stare.
Her silence a grim accusation
as I shifted uneasily in my chair.
No words escaped my lying lips.
No words could change my fate.
All men are confronted by the truth
Be they small or great.
Aletheia, you see, would be my judge;
such was my despair.
I looked again to see her face
and saw mine own image there.

John F. McCullagh
All Who Remain

Today three hundred gather recalling to the World its' shame. They've come once more to Auschwitz on a more comfortable train. The youngest, in their Seventies, were children at the time, when Russians overran the camp and exposed the Nazis' crimes. If you were gypsy Gay or Jew incarcerated there They starved and worked you unto death- Your grave was in the air. The walks were paved with bits of bone from those who died before. These lives and deaths were cataloged for the Reich Chancellor. All who remain now gather for this last and final time, to testify to their suffering and rebuke those who deny.

John F. McCullagh
Almost Perfect

Eight Thousand and twenty games it took
before Howie could put it in the books.
There was, here and there,
a base on balls.
One desperate catch against the wall.
One possibly disputed call,
but Johan Santana got them all..

Bob Murphy would have loved this night
The Park in Queens alive with cheers.
Fans walking out in a gentle rain
with his happy recap in their ears.

John F. McCullagh
Amber

A Prehistoric Dragon Fly

Encased in amber, on display

Caught my eye as I passed it by

in the museum yesterday.

Encased in amber, as if time

itself was stopped and held at bay.

You will never know decay

Or another summer's day.

You in amber, me in time

Both are trapped and on display.

You in resin are enshrined,

while I am seen encased in rhyme.

John F. McCullagh
Amontillado

Fortunato, I am called.
My friends rate me a connoisseur.
Tonight I wear a jester’s garb
for the feast day of misrule.

Tonight is fine, the wine flows free
With honeyed sweetness on my lips
My headgear rings with happiness
as I enjoy another sip..

Montresor came to speak with me
He wore a mask and monkish gown.
I shook the hand he offered me.
We spoke about a cask of wine.

A cask of sherry, dark and sweet
Amontillado- so he claimed
My friend had paid a premium.
Wished me to judge and share his gain.

He thought he’d ask Luchresi’s help
But that man is no judge of wine.
Give him grape juice in a cup
And Luchresi would exclaim ”How fine”

I took his arm and off we went,
Not knowing how this night would end.
I went quite willing to my doom
with this fiend I thought a friend.

Montressor’s servants were away
Leaving he and I alone
He poured for me a warming glass
then led me to the catacombs.

We sampled others of his wines
to keep the cold and damp away.
I coughed and could not catch my breath.  
But from my goal could not be swayed.

In the darkness of the tombs  
Among Montressor’s ancestral bones  
He victimized my drunkenness  
I found myself chained to the stones.

I quickly learned it was no jest  
I screamed in vain—none heard my cry  
As he with brick and mortar built  
this prison tomb where I will die..

John F. McCullagh
An Audience Of One: Midnight 11_24_1963

After all the crowds had gone, we came to the Rotunda where
Our murdered President lay in state, resting in his coffin there.
We shuffled in with our winds and woods to play a requiem for him.
Leonard Bernstein, with his grey tousled mane, motioned that we should begin.
Our fingers danced upon the strings as wood winds sounded sad and low.
In Life he loved to hear us play and we had loved him too you know.
Notes flowed in the November air, up to heaven for all we know,
Music taking the place of prayer; for many of us its long been so..
We’ve played before Thousands in New York and in concert halls around the
world,
But this night we played just for him,

for Massachusetts favorite son.

We played Mahler's requiem

for an audience of one.

John F. McCullagh
An Empty Bottle Of Mateus Rose’

An empty bottle of Mateus couldn’t help me drown my sorrow.
It cannot bring you back to me, and I’ll pay for this tomorrow.
All it has done is render me numb to your parting words and kiss;
a kiss goodbye, no public scene, no angry emphasis.
I had lost at Love before, yet something about today.
I think the finality of it all, drove me to this plebeian rose’.

When the love of your life has walked out of your life
What remains then to do or to say?
I will live work and sleep, pay my debts, keep my peace,
And still love you when I’m old and grey.

John F. McCullagh
An Inconvenient Sleet

I hear the scrape of steel on concrete
as neighbors struggle with the cold and wet.

General Winter and his storm troops
aren’t finished with us yet.

If we get these cars unburied
the icy roads still are a threat

People shivering at the bus stop
believe mass transit their best bet.

The airports closed, the planes are grounded
Transportation can’t be found

Here and there a bus is moving
Crawling around Gotham town

Staten Island Chuck is freezing
In his burrow underground

Well he should hide, that lying rodent.
I’d whack that mole could he be found.
Al Gore, in a piece of fiction,
Spoke of unremitting heat
I truly hope his butt is buried
Beneath this inconvenient sleet

Note

The discredited groundhog, S.I. Chuck, called for an early spring.

Gotham = New York City

John F. McCullagh
Anchor Baby

At the Empire's fringe
A woman and man
Traveled by night
over oceans of sand.

The woman, quite pregnant,
rode their sole beast of burden.
Her time; near at hand,
Her child's fate; uncertain

They saw a light in the distance
from a sheepherder's ranch
The couple was fearful
but saw it was their best chance

an abandoned outbuilding
on the outskirts of the spread
It had a tin roof
and some straw for a bed.

The blankets they carried
Jose lay on the straw
He then helped down Maria
who could travel no more.

The empire has watchers
with guns and night scopes
on the watch for illegals
there to frustrate their hopes.

Maria was panting
Jose said "bear down!"
The baby is coming
I can see it, the crown'

The watchers were coming
in their camouflage Jeep.
They pulled up near the ranch
to that garage they would creep

Looking in through a window
they saw the birth of the child
one of them swore
but the other just smiled.

The birth of that child
on American soil
would serve as an Anchor
for that man and his girl.

The couple thanked God
that their child had survived.
That the boy they named Jesus
in this new land would thrive.

John F. McCullagh
Anchor Baby (En Espanol)

Al margen del Imperio
Una mujer y un hombre
Recorrido por la noche
sobre los océanos de arena.

La mujer, muy embarazada,
montó su bestia de carga única.
Su tiempo, a la mano,
Su hijo es el destino, incierto

Vieron una luz en la distancia
desde el rancho de un pastor de
La pareja tenía miedo
pero vio que era su mejor oportunidad

una dependencia abandonada
en las afueras de la propagación
Tenía un techo de hojalata
y un poco de paja para la cama.

Las mantas que llevaban
José estaba en la paja
Luego ayudó a bajar María
que podía viajar sin más.

El imperio ha observadores
con armas de fuego y los ámbitos de la noche
a la caza de ilegales
no para frustrar sus esperanzas.

María jadeaba
José dijo: 'puchar!
El bebé viene
Lo puedo ver, la corona '

Los vigilantes venían
en su Jeep de camuflaje.
Se detuvieron cerca del rancho

www.PoemHunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive
para el garaje que se deslizaba

Mirando a través de una ventana
que vio el nacimiento del niño
uno de ellos juró
pero el otro se limitó a sonreír.

El nacimiento de ese niño
en suelo americano
serviría como un ancla
para que el hombre y su novia.

La pareja se dio gracias a Dios
que su hijo había sobrevivido.
Que el niño se llama Jesús
en esta nueva tierra podría prosperar.

Una historia de la natividad del Estado de la Estrella

John F. McCullagh
Anonymity

Almost peculiar thing is
Anonymity
Sometimes I seek it
But mostly it finds me.

John F. McCullagh
Après Vous

She’d liked their life the way it was;
their Pied de Terre above Broadway.
Now her lawyers indicate
It must be sold, there’s tax to pay...
His daughter seldom ever calls.
since her father’s burial day..
She would be someone to share the loss.,
But motherless she prefers to stay.
Jane sits before her mirror and
brushes back a wayward strand.
He used to love to brush her hair.
back when she still had her man.
She’d thought herself the luckiest girl-
She was his angel, heaven sent.
Photographs and memories
Now are all that she has left.
Gone two months, not even two,
Shrapnel killed her Marathon man.
He never reached the finish line
And now she’s living
Après Vous

John F. McCullagh
April 14, 1865 At Ford’s Theater

A comfortable rocking chair, a woven shawl upon his lap,
Lincoln sat in the Presidential box with trouble lurking at his back.
His guard had a terrible thirst-which he quenched at the neighboring bar.
The war was over after all-Who expected an attack?

Booth stealthily climbed the stairs, with murder on his mind.
John Wilkes spotted his prey, through a hole he had drilled in the door.
The South must be avenged! He would salvage Southern pride.
He unloaded his derringer in Lincoln’s head; the last Union dead of the war.

Clara Harris was screaming in terror, as Booth slashed her Beau to the bone.
“Sic Semper Tyrannis: ” Booth shouted, announcing the deed he had done
Booth’s spur caught on the star spangled bunting as he vaulted toward the stage.
Booth limped across to the door- His leg broken, bad luck for a man on the run.

John F. McCullagh
Arbusto Hotel (A Song Parody)

tune Elvis' Heartbreak hotel

(Chorus 1)  [Chorus 2]

Now since Juan left the Pueblo,
He’s found a new place to dwell-
An S.R.O.* in Farmingdale
The Arbusto Hotel

(And Juan is so lonely
Juan is so lonely
He’s missing Juanita
Juan is so lonely, he could cry)

Now Juan waits on the Corner
He’s waiting for a van
They drive away, he mows all day
He’s working for the man.

(And Juan is so lonely
Juan is so lonely
He’s missing Juanita
Juan is so lonely, he could cry)

Since Bush came into office
Immigration laws- a laugh
The rich get their cheap labor
While the Union gets the shaft

(And Juan is so lonely
Juan is so lonely
He’s missing Juanita
Juan is so lonely, he could cry)

Now Juan waits at the Border
Across the Rio Grand [sic]
Juanita wades toward him
With a baby in each hand
Now Juan isn’t lonely
Juan’s got Juanita
That girl’s Muy Bonita&
Juan’s not so lonely anymore

Now Juan is fat and happy
His life now has a plan
He’s living in Corona
With his large extended Clan

[Repeat 2nd Chorus]

Now Juan is quite unhappy
His futures looking grim
Some Guatemalan immigrant
Just stole his job from him!

John F. McCullagh
Armour And Amor

Now listen to me now
And to me pay attention
Sometimes the course of love
Needs a mother's intervention

Now listen to my tale
How some Armour old and rusty
Led Lass to discover
Love deep and true and lusty

One day while cleaning house
Mom found a coat of Armour
She didn't want the dusty thing
To clutter up her parlor

She made Lass take it back
And that's how Lass met Laddy
He was a big improvement
Over Tom and Dick and Harry

It worked out for the best
And thus did Lass acquire
A true love who's a knight-
She didn't settle for his squire.

John F. McCullagh
Much of our literature
has come from his pen-
or was He a She?
I can't say I ken.
When not writing poems
or dabbling in prose
Beautiful songs
Anon oft would compose.
Anonymous never gained
fortune or fame.
The works are immortal,
Their maker, unnamed.
Since the first of his line
painted Bison on stone,
Anonymous is
the artist unknown.

John F. McCullagh
Ask Not

It’s fortunate the rain had ceased early this warm November day.
I glance at my watch: 12: 27; "Lancer" and "Lace" are on their way.
I see Lee in his sniper’s perch. I still wonder if he’ll get this done.
I stand on the grassy knoll. Beneath my jacket, I touch my gun.
We must not fail; the King must die. I am the insurance it will be done.
A shot is fired from up above. “Lancer” grabs his throat and chest and Camelot becomes undone.

The second bullet finds its mark And “Lace” is spattered with brains and blood.
The crowd is gripped with sudden fear. Here and there they start to run
Some woman screams “They’ve murdered him”.
I secretly smile for we have won.
I make my way to the phone booth there inside the Dallas Barbecue.
I call Ruby at his club. "Jack, I have one more job for you."

John F. McCullagh
At Olduvai Gorge

Some time had passed already
since we’d come down from the trees.
We still walked with an awkward gait
Sore backs and aching knees.
Lar still might be alive, old mother,
if he hadn’t pawed my mate.
When I saw him mount her
in the brush
All I felt was rage and hate.
The jawbone of an ass was near
I took it in my hands.
I brought it down upon his skull
I killed with these two hands.
I wouldn’t let the Jackals have
the body of my friend.
I covered up his corpse with stones.
this is where it ends.
As a tribe we are too small, too few.
to let the blood lust linger.
We must keep moving further north
until we are out of danger.
Old mother nodded sagely.
Lars clansman did the same.
I promised I would share the catch
with the children of his name.
Some book may talk of Abel-
that at Cain’s hand he died.
but it was the tribe of Lucy
that first committed Hominidicide

A tale of the first Hominid population at Olduvai gorge, Africa and the first murder. It was over a woman. It would not be the last. (I have translated this from the original Bushman clic language)

John F. McCullagh
At Potter’s Field

The Government runs free health care-
for veterans of our foreign wars.
Their philosophy of care is sly-
Delay, deny and hope they die.

There are veterans by the score-
Wounded in our bootless wars-
Now Shelter bound or on the street
With potter’s field their next retreat.

If Government can thus ride rough
On those who fell defending us.-
What's their plan for you and I?
Delay, deny and hope we die.

John F. McCullagh
At The Babelplatz- May 10,1933

As darkness gathered, so did the crowds;  
They were like moths drawn to the flame.  
The swastikas were everywhere-  
All loyal party members came.  
The piled the books by Freud and Jung  
And untermenchen of their kind  
And tossed them on the bonfire there  
as part of Hitler's grand design.  
The flames leapt high into the night  
Fueled by these UN-German books  
As Goebbels watched in rapt delight,  
at how he had these people rooked.  
As darkness gathered so did the crowd  
to witness this unholy scene,  
unaware that those who start with books  
will end up burning human beings.

John F. McCullagh
At The Bottom Of The Stairs

They found her in the darkness
at the bottom of the stairs
She had, for some time, lived alone
-three days she had lain there.
Her skin was clammy to the touch,
pulse irregular and weak.
In and out of consciousness
She’d drift, but could not speak.
The nine eleven call was made
And the paramedics. arrived
Hours later we got the call:
Granny Jo had not survived.

I’m staying at her house now
As we sort things out for sale.
I’ve kept busy painting rooms.
and I’ve installed a new hand rail.
Some strange things have been happening;
my cat hissing at unseen specters.
of whom I’m unaware.
a door that opens of itself

a slowly rocking chair.

At night this old house whispers and moans,

Pipes bang and stair treads creak.

Especially on a rainy night

I find it hard to sleep.

Staying here at night alone

There’s one place I won’t go.

I avoid the basement steps.

where Dad found Granny Jo.

Sometime when I pass that door

I hear faint muttering there

Evil waits in the darkness

at the bottom of the stairs....

John F. McCullagh
At The Foot Of The Cross

At the foot of the Cross stood the Magdalene
with Mary, his mother, and John.
Jesus was now in extremis-
the curious people had gone.

The mark of the whips were upon him,
an ugly bruise under his eye.
Blood filtered down from the crown made of thorns.
dripping down from his face to one thigh.

Mary watched as her eldest was dying.
Bore her pain with incredible calm.
She wished that, his agony over,
She’d hold him once more in her arms.

With breath that was labored and shallow
He spoke with his life nearly gone
He commended young John to his mother
And commended his mother to John

He looked at the Magdalene sadly
With a love that’s ineffably rare.
Then with loud voice he cried out to Heaven
A fool might think this was despair.

Joseph of Arimethea
came with a ladder near dusk
With the help of the Priest, Nicodemus
He took the crucified Son from his Cross.

Mary was silently weeping
at the body of Christ in her arms.
She looked at the King Pilate murdered.
Whom the people had greeted with Palms

John F. McCullagh
At The Mendacity Institute

The Miss-Director was beaming with pride
as he came to escort me inside.
'Come along, these are perilous times,
there is much ugly truth we must hide.'
'Herr Goebbels was our school's inspiration.
Joe McCarthy taught here till he died.
Charlie Rangel is among our directors.
Our Grads over nations preside.'
'We recruit each year's class from young children
who display a disdain for the truth.'
'We start with a class on tall stories,
progressing to fibs and untruths.'
'By the time they are teens they are ready
to leave little white lies behind.'
'They engage in deceit and deception.
These skills help them rob people blind.'
'With our Grad course in prevarication
They misdirect and deflect with the great.'
'Obama was born in Hawaii,
his foes say he was birthed out of state.'
'When Bill Clinton was caught in that perjury
I nearly went out of my mind.'
'If only he'd paid more attention in Class
and less to some coed's behind.'

We had come to a massive rotunda
The Pantheon of all untruth.
Holograms of Stalin and Churchill
told whoppers in an endless loop.
There were quotes from
the World's Great Religions
inscribed on the sides of the wall.
A Left wing devoted to Lenin.
A right wing like a Munich beer hall.

' The sheeple must never be told
that a place like this even exists.'

' You can count on me not to inform them.'
I said, without moving my lips.

John F. McCullagh
August 1914

Your King and Country need you, men.
Kitchener, glaring in full kit.
Khaki is the color of the day
and everyone must do their bit.
A mighty Empire girds for war
yet unprepared to bleed and die.
Then bands still played patriotic airs;
We cheered them as they marched away.
Belle France's fields were soon entrenched;
protected with barbed wire fence.
A generation sent to war
will lie forever beneath those fields.
This was the cost too few foresaw
of this war to end all wars.
A cost paid many times since then;
paid in young lives by bad old men.

John F. McCullagh
In a Nimbostratus cloud I formed.
a trooper of the coming storm.
From a droplet, cold, alone,
my Starry crystal flake was formed

Expelled from my Eden by the wind
Thus did my descent begin.
Swarovski can’t produce my equal.
I’m unique- they’ll be no sequel.

Perhaps I’ll help cover your grass
Or, with the others, clog your paths.
On roads I’ll make your rear wheels slide
And make you wish you’d stayed inside

I glide in, glittering, past street lights
The earth already wrapped in White
Surprised I am to melt so young
captured on your daughter’s tongue.

John F. McCullagh
Autodidact

Each day I drive the Belt to work with a million other slobs. We pilot cars a decade old. We're lucky, we have jobs. Being stuck in traffic is no fun so my eyes search for distraction. Your bumper-stickered Civic offers motorists didaction. You've no shortage of opinions, you're a child of hope and change. gay women for abortion rights? forgive me, that seems strange. You're all for education, and it seems you're down on God Your promotion of vasectomy strikes me as rather odd. We creep along at walking speed in the misnamed morning rush I smile at one old sign that reads: 'Lesbians against Bush' I change lanes and creep up beside this most amusing creature. Shock and awe is what I felt- She is our children's teacher!

John F. McCullagh
Autumn Threnody

I have loved this time of year since the moment of my birth;
Its panoply of colored leaves that flutter down to earth.
I've loved the cool and bracing breeze, the fruits of harvest grown,
the sight of geese in Vee formation winging their way home.
My treks out to the cider mill for a warm mug or glass.
The times I've spent reflecting upon this year just passed.
I raise the collar of my coat against a sudden chill.
I feel cold winter's icy breath drawing nearer still.
Please delay the Christmas tunes another week or two.
Oktoberfest is barely done, so sit and have a brew.
Seduce me not with chestnuts roasting on an open fire.
Winter just means shoveling, the snow piled ever higher.
Its days: short, dark, and dreary. Its nights are long and cold.
So I mourn Autumn's passing with its gifts of red and gold.

John F. McCullagh
Baby Doe Of Deer Island

She was found there, by the shoreline, hidden in a plastic bag, 
where the ebb and flow of Ocean beat upon Deer Island’s sand. 
A little girl, just two years old, in a bright jumper clad 
A little beauty beat to death by some brute of a man.

No one could identify the body they had found 
so police employed an artist to help them solve the case. 
His rendering of “baby Doe” went up all over town. 
Soon it was on the internet. “Do you recognize this face?”

They broke the case last Thursday, they finally had her name. 
Her Mother and the boyfriend were arrested and arraigned. 
Each condemned the other for the murder of the Babe. 
A bronze fawn now commemorates the spot where she was slain.

John F. McCullagh
Baby Robbie (A Triolet)

The Snow lay gently on the ground
the day that you were born

Lay where it fell without a sound
The day that you were born.

I took you, son into my arms
(depite the nurses' faint alarms)
and sang a lullaby by Brahms

The snow lay gently on the ground
the day that you were born.

John F. McCullagh
Bad Santa

Stuck in a chimney high above ground
A burglar called out for help getting down down.

He'd stolen some money and pilfered some clothes.
then, by way of egress, up the chimney he rose.

But that move only works with a suit of red Clothes
on one night a year if you finger your nose.

He got stuck half way up and he couldn't get down.
The fire Department had to rescue this clown.

He'd broken in through a window and jumped down to the floor
If only he'd thought to go out the side door.

He was covered in soot from his cap to his feet.
I'm amazed he can dress himself, let alone speak.

I heard him exclaim as they booked him that night
'I sure am a dumb-ass, '
(That at least he got right)

A burglar in Atlanta had to be rescued by the fire department after an ill fated
attempt to mimic Santa Claus

John F. McCullagh
Baseball (Revised)

It begins, of course, in the Spring.
The evenings grow lighter
The air sweeter
and all the world is filled
With sweet optimism.

It continues through
the long hot summer
Humid evenings
and long hot afternoons.
It is a marathon
not a sprint.
Only one team each year
wins the ultimate game

It leaves us in the Fall
as Winter’s first foul
Imprecations
chill us to the marrow.
Days darken
and the sun seems absent.

It is both a faith and
a fixation.
Even in winter’s depths
It speaks to us of spring
and the hope
of redemption.

Unless you happen to root for the Mets...

John F. McCullagh
Bastogne

The longest darkness of the year
comes as Christmas is drawing near.
We dug and cursed the frozen ground
The snow was deep, more coming down.

We are surrounded and outgunned.
We’re short of food and winter gear.
Medicines are running out
and we have scores of wounded here.

I do believe my feet are frozen
I can no longer feel my toes.
But still I will not leave the line
What I’d give for a cuppa joe.

The sounds of Panzers in the wind-
Shouts heard in a guttural tongue-
We brace for yet one more attack
and vow we won’t be overrun.

We’re the battling bastards of Bastogne
No mother, no father, no Uncle Sam
The Germans came, we beat them back-
But now we’re a much smaller band.

When our surrender was demanded
They say McAuliffe told them nuts.
I’ve heard that Patton will relieve us
We’re waiting on “old blood and guts”.

www.PoemHunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive
Beautiful Sunset

He lived in a far distant land, surrounded by the sea,
far away from the masses of his fellow humanity.
He'd venture out upon that sea to fish or ride the waves.
He lived at peace with nature and with eternity.
His favorite time of every day was to see the glorious Sun
setting red beneath the waves on the far horizon.
I heard today that he is gone, departed out of time.
He has closed his book of verse and written his last line.
I promise to remember, friend, for you were good and kind.
Every sunset I have left will recall you to my mind.

John F. McCullagh
Beauty And The Beast

In face and feature, line and grace,
a beauty like few others.
The first blush of her youth now past
Found her a wife and mother.

Her husband was a brutish man
Of gentleness devoid
His psychiatrist’s opinion read:
“Schizophrenic- paranoid”

Beauty’s son was with some friends.
Her bag was packed and ready.
She’d make a clean break with her man-
She’d found a job already.

He’d just been RIF’d that fateful day.
And spent it in a bar
The drink but fueled his darkening rage.
He could barely drive his car.

No witness saw what happened next.-
None lived to testify
But the evidence of her wounds suggests
That Beauty begged to die.

Her picture on the Post’s front page
Displayed a classic beauty.
-The bleeding corpse the coroner saw:
The horror and the pity.

John F. McCullagh
Beggar Thy Neighbor

Mario Draghi is a stimulating guy,  
To rouse a dead economy,  
There's nothing he won't try.  
He'll lower rates and lower rates  
then lower rates again.  
Til the exchange rate for the Euro  
reaches parity with the yen.  
When he eases quantitatively  
Then stocks you ought to buy.  
Still, It won't be pretty in the end  
when money comes to die.

John F. McCullagh
Billion Dollar Bracket

I want to see ol’ Warren’s face
When I claim the Billion prize.
When my perfect bracket
takes the cash,
Buffett’s sure to be surprised.
The odds were set against me
much higher than surmised.
Like making sixty free throws
in only fifty tries.
I’d have a better chance,
They said, to date a super model.
The sort of girl I never get
And google just to ogle.
I bet with Buffet’s cash on hand
I’ll attract their sighs,
Kate and Emmy will cat fight
to be first in my eyes.

John F. McCullagh
Black Friday, The Shopping Poem

The people crowd the entrances
at Malls all over town.
To seize the choicest bargain deals,
They'd gladly knock you down.
The retailers all hold their breath
as shopping gets in gear.
Will Santa fill his sleigh as hoped?
-or lay off more Reindeer?
There are plastic toys from China
colored with suspicious paint.
Whip out your last credit card
(-when you see the bills, you'll faint.)
"The children must have Christmas!" &quot;
No request will be denied.
Never mind your youngest child
has just turned thirty five.
Don't forget a gift for you
Don't you deserve the best?
Shopping is such good therapy
for the financially depressed

John F. McCullagh
Bob Forsch R.I.P.

His heart, like a knuckle ball, fluttered in his chest. A most unwelcome pressure—he felt his chest compressed.

One week before he stood in awe upon the mound at Busch. Cameras flashed as he let fly the ceremonial first pitch.

A champion in eighty two, A Card for fifteen years. Bob Forsch, a loved familiar name brought out before the seventh game.

The first pitch that he threw that night would also prove to be his last. The Cards went on to victory adding to their storied past.

A heart attack, the neighbors say. Sixty one, so young, to fade away God stole a page from LaRussa's book in giving this starter a quick hook.

Last week, Bob Forsch, tossed the ceremonial first pitch before his Cardinals went on to win the World Series. Bob tossed two no hitters in his career and his Brother ken had tossed one also. The only brothers in Baseball history to accomplish that feat. When a starting pitcher is removed from a game early, before it has lasted long enough to be an official game, it is said the manager gave him a 'quick hook' Tony LaRussa, the manager of the Cardinals was notorious for changing pitchers multiple times in every game.

John F. McCullagh
Born To Run

I’ve seen him play a dozen times,
watched him strike that familiar chord.
He’s never lost the joy of youth
as he starts, again, his song.
Others might go through the motions,
bored to death with the hits they play
Springsteen lives within the moment
until the last notes fade away.
Like Derek Jeter on the base paths
Or, if I might steal DiMaggio’s line,
Springsteen plays on for the fan
who’s seeing him for the first time.

John F. McCullagh
Borrowed Voices

My parents passed away last spring. Two weeks apart, it was hard to bear. She was a cellist, he played violin. Their instruments were old and rare. Growing up, I'd hear them practice. For practice is the only way to make effort appear effortless in the first chairs on concert day. Our house resounded with their music. As I grew, I'd also play. Our family spoke with strings, not voices. Then there was silence, when they passed away.

Her Cello was made by Testore; His violin was by Lupot, both treasures of the Luthier's art. I wept to see them gathering dust. Mute witnesses as Death played his part.

It's hard for artists nowadays to afford such quality. hard, as well, for me to sell, to send their instruments away A friend suggested a better way; to keep my loved ones' legacy My colleagues play with them on loan; their borrowed voices speak to me.

John F. McCullagh
Bottom Of The Ninth

Father Time stood undefeated.
Bonds came close, but Barry Cheated.
Roger Clemens had a career for the ages
but oft fell prey to roid based rages.
Mariano Rivera was a more worthy foe
No pharmacological freak was Mo.
He threw one pitch, his control well learned,
and he chose to leave on his own terms.
I stood up and joined the cheers
the day Rivera last appeared
and, though I wept to see him go,
Time would never lay him low.
Mo Struck out Time, he had it cooking
A called third strike that left Time looking
like Beltran caught in the bright lights
good morning, good Evening and Good NIGHT!

Actually Mo Rivera's last batter popped out to second and was the second out of the top of the ninth at Yankee stadium when Andy Pettite and Derek Jeter were sent out to remove him from a game that the Yankees lost to the Rays 4-1. this is a metaphorical expression of the fact that Mariano Rivera left the game on his own terms when he still could play at a very high level. Certainly among the greatest Yankees of the modern era.

John F. McCullagh
Branded

Her little black dress is by Ralph Lauren,
her complexion is Lancôme.
Estée Lauder blushed her lips
And Apple made her phone.
She loves the feel of Hermes' silk
upon her naked skin.
Her shoes are Gucci,
her bag by Coach.
Her perfume is 'my Sin'

Lady Clairol turned her hair
the color of ripe wheat.
She's a devil wearing Prada
who looks good enough to eat.
I ponder on this vision
And a stray thought makes me laugh:
My fiercely independent woman
Has been 'branded' like a calf.

John F. McCullagh
Burgers And Bubbly

He was a tall drink of water, fresh out of his teens
She, a dark eyed lovely, dressed in tie dyed jeans.
He remembers it was in study hall she first caught his eye.
As it was Saint Patrick's Day, he didn't pass her by.

It was with some trepidation that he asked her out to dance,
When she said &quote;yes&quot; He was happy he had dared to take the chance.
Their first date was at &quote;the Boxcar&quot;; they danced to sixties songs.
Perhaps the place was crowded; but to them they seemed alone.

As closing time grew closer, they stepped out to grab a bite.
As college students they were poor; his budget very tight.
Some burgers from MacDonald's were the best that he could do.
&quote;I could get used to this.&quot;, he thought, and his single days were through

All in all a good first date; both Knew there would be others.
They paired the burgers with champagne provided by his Frat brothers.
It's been nearly half a century since they danced upon that floor.
so its burgers and bubbly on St. Pat's; then, now and evermore.

John F. McCullagh
The Taliban has lost many men.
And some others vacation in Cuba.
Marines hunt the villains in
Tunnels and caves
While Osama hides out in Aruba.

Yet, in theatre, the Taliban spreads
Like some Santa Ana fed fire,
Out of check, out of control
Like weeds on a grave, ever higher.

How many more must be tortured and killed
Before Arabs throw shoes at your dome?
How many soldiers and sailors deployed,
Nevermore to see family and home?

Shock them and awe them
And level their homes.
Take out yet more Chinese loans!
This is murder and mayhem
With vendor finance,
They manage on hatred alone.

Placing Murph’s dog tags around your own neck
While symbolic, was still a good start.
Here are three thousand others to try on for size
Each stands for a Mom’s broken heart.

Note:
Then President Bush put the dog tags of a slain soldier named Murphy around his own neck during the awarding of a posthumous medal
Butterfly

A caterpillar had the feeling
That change was coming
That time was stealing.
To embrace the metamorphosis
It wove a cocoon around its chest
And choose our wall to take its rest.

The young are thoughtless, often cruel
And I was no exception.
I would have destroyed it but
for Frankie’s intervention.

Frankie lived in the corner house
He was older and quite wise.
He taught me that this green cocoon
would change into a butterfly.
He bade me watch, he had me wait
to see the wonder taking shape.
We saw the Monarch first take wing
once caterpillar, now a King.
Several summers passed us by.

I still lived but Frankie died-

He was just eighteen, Young and brave

A landmine put him in his grave.

He died just before Saigon’s fall

His name’s inscribed upon the Wall

Corporal Frank Evangelista Junior,

beloved by mother and mourned by sister.

A terrible loss when Frankie died-

He might have been a butterfly.

(The incident with the Butterfly happened in 1960. Lance Corporal Frank Paul Evangelista died during the Vietnam war when a landmine blew up his jeep. I recall he died in March of 1969, but I altered the time lines slightly(using my poetic license) .. Had he emerged from the experience of war, he may have proved to be a great man.)

John F. McCullagh
Buying Time

Time has traded in his wing-ed chariot;
He donated it to the obnoxious Kars for Kids.
Still, I wouldn't worry about Time.
It's not like the old boy has hit the skids.
I saw him, just today, down by the station
He was styling in his Porsche nine forty-four.
Whatever is his final destination-
He'll be getting there much faster, that's for sure!

It's almost as if Time had a midlife crisis;
Realized he's no stud muffin anymore.
His grey and grizzled beard could use a trim.
He should buy a suit and ditch the robes.
He needs a woman to help him spend his money;
With the miracle of compound interest he has loads.
Thus, while I may drive a Fourteen year old Chevy
and eat my lunch out of a paper bag.
Time is styling in his Porsche nine forty-four;
I guess, for him, the economy's not that bad.

John F. McCullagh
Camino De Baldosas Amarillas

Cuando Dorothy recorrió los caminos de Oz
Sus compañeros eran deficientes:
Uno carecía de valor,
Uno carecía de cerebro,
Uno de ellos era cruel, pero
Ax competente.

Ella era una inmigrante ilegal,
de Kansas, de todos los
lugares!
Imagínate, cuando ella y
Toto Cham-
la mirada en los rostros de las personas.

Sin embargo eso fue hace setenta años.,
En otro lugar y tiempo
Justo antes de ir a la guerra
contra el mal personificado.

Si Dorothy, hoy en día, se presentó
con una convocatoria similares
El Asistente para las confunda
de una delegación del Congreso

Por falta de cerebro y corazón y espinas
Nuestro Congreso es más que suficiente-
Un poco de coraje la falta, los cerebros carecen de algunos
Algunos no tienen corazón, pero
fiscales competentes

John F. McCullagh
Cancer Ward

Antiseptic... white... clean....
Instruments of Stainless steel
.A lazy oscillating light
tracks my heartbeat on a screen.
A long thin needle on the tray
Fascinates my captive stare
Like the cobra with its prey
It will strike me deep this day
The air is institutional
the smell of fear and doom
My king pursued by the pawns of Death
we play my endgame in this room.

John F. McCullagh
Carbon Sinks

I think that I shall never see
a better Carbon Sink than M.I.T.’s

It helps keep green house gas at bay
By sequestering it away

The Carbon Sink works like a tree
but does it more efficiently

When trees in wintertime are bare
The Carbon Sink still cleans the air

And trees can yield up carbon once again
When Forest fires make them burn

Poems are made by fools like me
But Carbon Sinks are made by M.I.T

John F. McCullagh
Cash For Keys

They’d struck the best deal they could manage.
Then the movers showed up at the door.
The home they had loved, they departed
It hurt them that the neighbors all saw.

With two girls, both boarding at Stanford
they’d refinanced their home to raise cash.
Just before J.P. Morgan acquired
Bear Sterns and before Lehman crashed.

By the Spring, Susan's work became part time.
Ronnie threw out his back in the Fall.
With income down half from the boom years,
foreclosure was hard to forestall.

In Riverdell, there are some mansions
that people pay millions to own.
Although Susan's place was more modest,
the river ran right past her home.

Susan's house now sits sad and empty
the snow piling up all around.
It 's been winterized by her old lender
at least till a buyer is found.

I wonder if Eve and her Adam
suffered just as much pain and disgrace
when they got their eviction from Eden
and had to hand back the key to the place.

John F. McCullagh
Catfish Hunter

Hard rubber plate there in the dust
and just beyond, a mound.
With difficulty Catfish turned
and paced the muddy ground.
Even with the walker
these few steps were hard indeed.
Shoulders weak, steps faltering
from Lou Gehrig’s sad disease.

The blue sky stretched above him
so infinite and vast.
With difficulty Catfish reached
back, deep into his past.
He did not think of trophies
or recall his perfect game.
Not at all about the millions
he once got to sign his name.

He was pitching for the Yankees
against men in Dodger Blue.
The World Series game on the line
some whispered he was through
His mind recalled each move he’d made
Each strikeout pitch he threw.
In Memory the fastball’s song
still sang out loud and true.
Like an old dog fast asleep
might dream that He’s still young.
Catfish thought about the night
His last Series ring was won

Soon, too soon, he’d be relieved
of ball, of life, of game
He’ be a plaque upon the wall
down at the hall of fame.
A few more weeks
and he’d be gone-
a casualty, nothing more.
The object now of whispered prayers,
This man fans once adored.

John F. McCullagh
Catullus And His Lesbia

Sweet Lesbia, hold me in your arms,
give me kisses without ceasing.
Your husband fights in Caesar's cause
and is no challenge in deceiving.
Your smooth white shoulders, beautiful,
that never see the Sun.
They are a feast for this poets' eyes
when your stola comes undone.
Beneath your tunica intima
are sweet breasts that fed your child.
I hope you'll bare them to my lips
in just a little while.
The shadows of the autumn Sun
creep clear across the room.
but Lesbia's sweet smile is enough
to brighten up the gloom.
Great Pompey has been put to rout,
Caesar claims the curule chair.
Outside the World has gone to Hades
Not that this poet cares.
For Lesbia is world enough
to treasure and explore.
If more were of my frame of mind
what need had men for war?

John F. McCullagh
Celtic Cross

In the hills above Strabane
in a little churchyard there
stands a Celtic cross of stone
That marks my father's parents' grave.
The Day is raw, a spit of rain
The wind sweeps low across the plot
In time their names will disappear.
The forces of nature serve to blot.
Still the Celtic cross endures
long after the inscription fades,
to be a sign of what they were,
when of their names, no trace remains.

John F. McCullagh
Chapel Of Love

She was likely in a drunken daze
when she wed, unknowingly.
A Vegas drive in chapel
Was the spot they did the deed.
Twenty years or so would pass
Ere she would finally see
That when she said "I do" she did,
Albeit witlessly.
Now Janeane has got divorced,
her single life to resume.
It seems nuptials last longer
When you don't know there's a groom!

John F. McCullagh
in the High School cafeteria
there was horror on the menu;
A loner with a pistol
seeking victims and a venue.

Three times the pistol fired
and kids began to fall.
It might have been a massacre
if not for old Frank Hall.

Frank Hall was the football coach
with a short and stubby frame.
While others fled, he charged towards
this criminal insane.

Frank Hall didn't stop to think
he didn't have the time.
As he charged towards the gunman
His life was on the line.

The gunman fired once at Frank,
the shot rang high and wide
It caught a fleeing coed,
put a flesh wound in her side.

The gunman turned in panic
as the first responders came
He fled into the nearby woods,
just some kid named T.J. Lane.

Three teenagers lay dying,
one more would never stand.
Many more lives had been spared
by the courage of one man.

He comforted the dying
as the ambulance came late.
The moment found the man-
was it providence or fate?
John F. McCullagh
Cheep Thrills

This Voyeur with binoculars
sits waiting in the blind,
half hidden by the rushes
That grow tall on either side.
Perhaps I’d spot a Peregrine
or a hawk on the attack.
My camera is beside me, and,
should I catch one in the act.
I’d photograph a mating pair
(but artfully, with tact.)

So far there’s just a flock of wrens
Not much this day I see.
I start to get the strange sensation
that they’re here observing me.

John F. McCullagh
Child Without A Name

I spoke no human language.
I never put on clothes.
The sum of my possessions
was ten fingers and ten toes.

My mother was too rich or poor.
Too scared, too old, too young,
So many reasons for her choice,
by which I was undone.

I never felt the sunshine,
or sailed the wine dark sea.
I had a heartbeat just like yours
until they murdered me.

There are those who would protest my death
But most here are nihilistic.
To some I was a child of God;
to others, a statistic.

I have no death certificate
I have no human name.
I was terribly inconvenient,
but I was human, just the same.

John F. McCullagh
Childhood’s End

My friends all came and said goodbye
To College off we go.
Hugs and kisses all around
From everyone I know.

Tonight I saw my family-
(Enjoyed my last good meal) .
Tomorrow -cafeteria
With meal plans I must deal.

I spend my last night in my room
(Allow myself a tear)
How will my pandas get along
And thrive without me near.

My books, my things, my DVD’s
so much to leave behind.
But pack mule Daddy must insist
I travel light this time

Childhoods end, not Journey’s end
One more look back for me
Then off to make my future
at the University.

John F. McCullagh
Thanks for nothing, Cindy Perl.        
After five long years of dating-        
Movies, concerts, masticating-        
You decided David Tepper’s not for you.

You needed one who'd make you smile    
And provide for your lifestyle.       
So you went and wed a dentist-        
Good for you.

All that Tepper’s managed since        
is Four Billion more or le$$.
He has a mansion in the Hamptons by the shore.

Cindy, you backed the wrong horse-    
But don’t go getting a divorce.       
Your dentist fills your cavities      
For you

John F. McCullagh
Circle Unbroken

I remember a day somewhere in time,
Before these words were spoken.
When I was still your little one
And our circle was unbroken.

Then I came to the foot of your bed
Watching, helpless, sighing
Shallow breathing, then a gasp
Then silence. Someone crying.

In this grey world I dressed in black
In somber tones of night
I walked like one still in shock
Uncertain of the light.

Sometimes I sat here in your room
Quiet and alone
As if the presence of your things
Could lure your presence home.

Once on a midsummer’s night
As I approached my home
The front door opened welcome
But I was quite alone.

The night was hot, no breathe of air
No breeze to make it move
What’s more I’m sure I locked that door
But its nothing I can prove

Some explanation might be found
For what occurred that night
And probably my thoughts unsound
But I took comfort from that sight

I remembered a day somewhere in time,
Before these lines were spoken.
For I am still your little one
our circle is unbroken.
John F. McCullagh
Citius Altius Fortius?

The starters' pistol sounded once
and sneakered feet churn up the clay-
Fame and fortune they pursue
Four hundred meters ahead, gold, lay.

Muscles strain and lungs may burn
inspired by Olympic fire
Faster, Higher, Stronger, yes-
The Motto does serve to inspire.

The race is run and some excel
Others just happy they took part.
Those fastest, on the podium stand,
to hear their anthem, hand on heart.

Obama has a different dream:
He'd make those Medals Lead, Tin and Clay
If no man makes his own success
why give the precious stuff away?

Never mind the countless dawns
they rose to run in rain or heat.
The weights they lifted in the gym.
How hard they trained on blistered feet.

If no man makes his own success
and government is the source of all
Explain to me, Barrack Hussein,
How did the Soviet Union fall?

John F. McCullagh
Claim Check

It's true girls come with baggage,
be she starlet or plain Jane.
The trick for guys is finding one
whose baggage they would claim.

It's said all girls are crazy,
and experience proves it true.
The secret is to find the girl
who's crazy about you.

It's not as if we're perfect,
We have baggage of our own.
It's the burden we must carry
if we're to ever have a home.

John F. McCullagh
Closing Credits

My director and producers names will roll up after mine.  
My author will want credit too and His name is next in line.  
My supporting cast was fabulous in this game of 'Let's pretend'  
Now, as the credits start to roll, my 'show' has reached the end.  
The Play?, alas, a tragedy; the hero had to die.  
The Soundtrack? filled with somber notes; this was no lullaby.

I'd love to do a sequel and assure you I'd be back,  
but the rushes weren't good enough to make me confident of that.  
When the best boy's name appears; he who had the gaffer's back,  
The word 'Finis' will briefly flash

and all will fade to black.

John F. McCullagh
Cold Case

When Otto Frank returned to his city
He knew, already, that his wife was dead.
Of his girls, Margot and Ann, he had yet heard nothing.
The silence gave birth to foreboding and dread.

On the day that he learned of his families' fate;
That day that he learned both his daughters were gone.
Frank took on the mission of finding the traitor:
Who informed the Gestapo? Who raised the alarm?

He once again walked the streets of his city,
Free to enjoy the warmth of the Sun.
Reliving the same day over and over;
The day they were taken at the point of a gun.

Which smiling face? Which former employee had hated the Jews in the depths of their heart?
Why did the food that he ate taste like ashes?
Why did his girls die just a few days apart?

One man in one lifetime could not find the answer
Otto Frank died still not knowing the truth.
Who had betrayed them, the man and his family?
Who was it who stole away beauty and youth?

John F. McCullagh
Cold Clay Heart

Look at you in your best blue suit.
Look at you in your power tie.
They've given us this last moment all alone,
a final chance to say goodbye.
When last we spoke I had no time.
I was busy on the phone.
I hurried you off to your bed
Where, as Fate had it, you died alone.
You were kind of heart and wise.
I am the child of your old age.
I chide myself for being brusque
just as you exited the stage.
Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned,
one of omission on my part.
Death has stolen the warmth of Love away
And left you with a cold clay heart.

John F. McCullagh
Colleville Sur Mer (D Day + 50)

The day is hot, no hint of a breeze
As I kneel down on ancient knees
At the grave of you, most brave,
who died in Omaha’s first wave.

Our mother never did recover
from losing you. Like many mothers.
she, ever after, hid the scar.
Poor recompense is a gold star.

Rows of crosses on the plain
Each bears a date, a rank, a name.
Lives ended by the chance of war.
None will see their home once more.

Was your sacrifice in vain?
One tyrant fell, but more remain
The Reich that fell now better known
as the common market Euro zone.

Europe’s Jews gained a respite
From Hitler’s hate and krystalnacht
Yet soon the surging Moslem tide
May again erupt in genocide

My grandson helps me to my feet.
and steadies me with his strong arm.
The Medal of Honor on my chest
belongs, in truth, to these who rest.

John F. McCullagh
Come To My Window

The same folks who regulate soda size,
and cheer as our youth turn to pot,
Just passed a law in the Golden State
Let me know if you like it or not.

On the college Campus in Cali
before couples can couple you see
both parties must sign a consent form
as state bill 967 decrees.

No matter if she's your fiancee,
They don't care He's your steady or not,
It's rape if you have no consent form
There's no excuse if you forgot.

The people who championed Liberty
for the gays and the transgenderees
should stay out of straight people's bedrooms

but will they? - there's no guarantee.

John F. McCullagh
Comes A Horseman...

Short is our tenure
on this beautiful Earth.
As brief as the grass
In winter's cold breath.
Death, the implacable foe,
Bids us yield.
Faith is our Armor,
our blocker, our shield.
Denial, our method
of avoiding the shroud.
When Donne is not done,
Death be not proud.
A tenuous tenor may
Give voice to fear.
Yet, turning to face him,
No one is there.
The prize is our self
And possession is all.
All else is but vanity
To hang on a wall.

John F. McCullagh
Comes The Revolution

The 'one percent' are tired
dealing with the unwashed masses
who harass them on Wall Street
while mostly sitting on their asses..

In a bold preemptive strike
by the favored one percent
The wealthy seized Zuccotti park
and there they pitched their tents.

It's a very civil protest,
a catered call to arms.
Instead of drums and gongs,
an orchestra plays Brahms

English butlers with refined accents
now go from tent to tent
with champagne in fluted glass
for those who can pay rent.

The gilded age was long ago-
its passing, some lament.
We paper over losses now
by piling debt on debt.

When this house of cards comes down
as such are wont to do.
This land will have new masters
but it probably won't be you.

John F. McCullagh
Conductor Of Souls

I boarded the train at the rush hour peak.
like hundreds of others at. the end of the week.
Darkness came quickly at this time of year
It was Pearl Harbor day and Christmas was near.
Dark was my skin and dark was my heart
and dark was the drama in which I’d play my part
In a brown paper page I carried my gun
with enough ammunition to kill the white ones.
Out near Merillon Station, I stood up from my seat.
Whites had ruined my life and revenge would be sweet.
Like a deadly conductor I walked down the aisle
punching everyone’s ticket, high caliber style.
Their screams were my music, their fear was my meat
I served it up raw with blood on the seat.
It took three to subdue me once I emptied my gun
If they hadn’t overwhelmed me I’d have killed everyone.
Six dead, nineteen wounded, some trampled they say.
as the whites in the car started running away.
I sit here in prison with no hope of parole
in this place I am known as the conductor of souls

John F. McCullagh
Continuing Resolutely

There is a bankrupt government
Down in Washington D.C
A petty despot is presiding
from sea to shining sea.

The Senate is dysfunctional
The House perhaps is worse-
Obsessed with banning sex acts
That they hadn't thought of first.

They furloughed the non-essentials-
Eight hundred thousand out the door.
Had they looked around the chamber
They could find five hundred more!

They'll be no negotiations
As they fight over the purse
We’ll pay fines or buy insurance
Affordable care-my ass.

A President elected
Largely based upon his skin
Will be followed by a woman
With more baggage than an INN

A bigger group of hypocrites
I hope never to see
Than this Congress full of Baboons
Posturing on T.V.

John F. McCullagh
Corn Silk

Beautiful, most men would call her
Five foot two, not one inch taller
Her golden hair, a corn silk hue,
Her eyes, a deep Aegean blue.

Sweet William dead, my wife away
We’d meet in secret at a play
At racecourse with box lunch packed
Or at dinners off the beaten track

A polymath, I swear it’s true
An amateur musician too
She wrote the songs
and sang them too.

Alas my life’s not free to share
She met another, it’s only fair
In my memory she never ages-
Just grows more beautiful by stages.

John F. McCullagh
Crazy Mary

I never knew why she chose my sidewalk as her own;
Perhaps it was the subway grate that made it feel like home.
Children called her “Crazy Mary”; it became her sobriquet.
She would disappear each morning and God knows where she went.
Her face was bronzed from too much Sun, her tousled hair unkempt,
and, each night, she would return to my sidewalk where she slept.
She would huddle ‘neath her blanket when we had a soaking rain.
On hot nights she was grateful for a breeze from a passing train.
For the well and well to do, Toronto’s a fine city.
But the winters here are always harsh; for the homeless it’s a pity.

One morning she did not awake, the police were called this time.
The coroner took the body but found no evidence of a crime.
Thereafter it seemed strange to me to glance out at the spot
where “Crazy Mary” used to be but nowadays was not.
This was where “Crazy Mary” spent the last of all her time,
but there was not a single rose to call her fate to mind.

Then, in a dream, she appeared to me and I was all undone;
Upon her head was a crown of stars and her clothes shone like the Sun.

John F. McCullagh
Crispy Orange Duck

There is this very orange man
who isn't sleeping well these days.
He has attained his heart's desire-
and now watches as it slips away.
He's a very angry man
who takes to twitter for a rant.
He'd like to bomb Kim Jun tomorrow
But his generals say he can't.
His failure to repeal, replace
Convinces everyone
The man's a crispy orange duck
Before his first term's done.
He rants and raves on twitter
on and on about Barrack.
He is envious of Bannon-
Such flexibility he lacks.
So he must console himself
With twitter based attacks.

John F. McCullagh
Here, in the depths of winter, when the earth is bare and brown,
You will notice, if you look carefully, depressions in the ground.
My guide told me that here there are about one hundred men
who served beneath the Stars and Bars and gave their lives for them.

The Union line was well entrenched up there upon the hill.
solid shot and canister rained down on the Rebs at will.
If Ewell had thought it practical, on the first day of the fight,
The result could have been different had his soldiers seized these heights.
When he forfeited his advantage, the Stars and Stripes held sway;
Union forces would repel his sorties the next day.

So, with careful measured steps, we walk above these men,
Who loved, not wisely but too well, the cause for which they bled.
Do not disturb this hallowed ground; leave them at rest I pray.
Until they hear the trumpet's call upon the Judgment Day.

John F. McCullagh
Cyber Monday

Cyber Monday is my day
to Wrap my Christmas list.
I travel down the Amazon
to find that one-click bliss.

I keep my credit card on file
so when the impulse strikes me
I hop on line and grab my find
They'll ship it free most likely..

I joined their super saver club
which gives me priority.
I save a bunch on shipping
as I buy there constantly.

I pity those fools Thanksgiving night
waiting there on line
before a brick and mortar store
I guess for some that's fine.

Somehow Amazon recalls
the things I've bought before
and comes up with suggestions
I think its called Al Gore.

John F. McCullagh
Dancing In The Dark

It’s seldom that folks see me dance,  
for want of occasion or partner.  
My stiff joints pray “give others a chance!  
Just sit with your drink in the dark there.”

I’m not really hip and can’t hop  
Arthritis has put paid to that dream.  
I’d let younger ones gambol and lark  
here I’d sit, waiting patient, for ice cream.

But no, I sway out on the hardwood,  
locked in a slow dance with you.  
I clinch like a boxer, exhausted-  
Whose opponent has landed a few.

I pray that the music is ending-  
My balky hip screams with each turn  
After this I’ll for sure need a Walker  
A Blue, on the rocks, I have earned.

John F. McCullagh
Dante And Beatrice

A pleasing emerald were those eyes that turned to look at me. Although I was a boy of nine, that fixed my destiny.

I scarcely thought of food or drink so perfect was her smile. I would be in heaven were she to bide with me awhile.

I sought out the places she might go, as we were of the same class. Alas, I was a step too slow to catch the echo of her laugh.

I saw her once, at Arno Bridge, when she was sweet sixteen. She saw me, smiled, and spoke my name. I was a tongue tied teen.

Her wealthy parents made a match and betrothed her to another man. My parents likewise chose my bride and bade me take her hand.

My Beatrice died, aged twenty four when Heaven stilled her lips. Dead, before I pled my love or touched her fingertips.

Perhaps on the streets of Heaven our eyes will once more meet. Then there will be time enough for love, provided we’re discreet.

John F. McCullagh
Dark Angel

You cannot see my wings and my true visage would cause sorrow;
In my hands I hold the key that would destroy all your tomorrows.
I stand nearby the President; I'm at his beck and call.
In Life I'm a nonentity, in Death, the Lord of all.
Some think of me as "friend"; my existence your protection.
In Truth I'm just the agent of your mutual destruction.
I am but one of many who carry this dread weight;
the codes for Armageddon that may spell your planet's fate.
As I keep my silent vigil, the clock ticks towards midnight.
Ignorance and arrogance define your awful plight
I am the fearful Seraphim at the gate of Paradise;
That place from which you were expelled and cannot enter twice.

John F. McCullagh
Dark Victory 11/11/18

The Bells ring out great Peals of joy.
The war is won, Great Albion.
It merely cost a million dead,
a generation lost and done.

To you, fate tendered victory sweet,
to the Germans, a bitter peace.
There, fatherless boys, abed, asleep,
plot revenge for their deceased.

In the Wilfred Owen house;
no alloyed joy to meld with sorrow:
That day they learned their son had died
They'll dress the house in Black tomorrow.

His mother knew before word came,
she had a sense her son was gone.
That he'd be among the last to fall
for the glory of Great Albion

He fought almost unto the end,
dying in the war's last week.
When Mortal flesh and bullets meet
Poets are silenced when machine guns speak..

There is a pathos in his fate,
dying in the last week of war
Like the man who sailed the Ocean deep,
only to drown in sight of shore.

The poet Wilfred Owen, died in an attack on a German Machine gun nest on 11/04/1918, one week before the Germans sued for peace. His parents received word that their only son had died just as the Church bells were rung to celebrate
the Armistice. Albion is a archaic name for Great Britain

John F. McCullagh
Das Meter Is Running

Bonn Prostitutes working the streets
now pay twice for displaying their treats.
They already pay substantial income tax,
for plying the world's oldest profession.
Now Politicians, also whores of a sort,
want more money despite the recession.
Now to make the sin tax yield sweeter
Certain streets now have Prostitute meters.
Six Euros a night is the rate
for these girls who have more than one “date”
So if your “dame des abends” says “Antreiben!”
as the clocks ticking down on the evening.
She has a legitimate worry
in telling her patron to hurry.
In Bonn, the meter is running
and only the meter maid’s coming!

(The city of Bonn, Germany has installed street meters for Prostitutes. They must purchase (and display? ?) a ticket to solicit on the street. Meter maids enforce payment and collection. I envision the meter maids being like the 400 pound female gorillas Mayor Bloomberg employs here in New York. It's like easy pass for an easy lass.
There is a smattering of German in the poem
Dame des Abends= Lady of the Evening
Antreiben= hurry(up))

John F. McCullagh
Dead Man’s Chest

The ugly scar straight down my chest has begun to heal, and the pain is less. Each week I walk a little more at least back and forth to the corner store. On hot days I get short of breath and I must be careful to take my rest. Still, I'm lucky and can’t complain about a scar and a little pain. I’m back at home with the ones I love best

All thanks to a gift from a dead man’s chest.

John F. McCullagh
Death Of A Star

Across ten Billion years of life she radiated her faint light; an insignificant yellow dwarf; one of trillions in the night. Then as her fuel was running low her diameter began to grow Much like some aging matrons that you and I both know. She did not die dramatically, No Nova as a swan song, she faded from memory over time, a brown dwarf few telescopes could see. All the Kings that ever were, all the mighty and the small Were reduced to cinders by her death their mighty deeds beyond recall. Somewhere, out on the spiral arm, An alien views a photo plate. She notices the star called Sol is gone and speculates upon its fate.

John F. McCullagh
Death Rode A Fast Horse

“Sweet Kiss” was the horse and Frank Hayes was his rider,
Both destined this day to gain fame.
Frank was a stable boy on his first stake horse;
The horse too was a novice, but game.
This pairing went off at 20-1, but was well worth the risk of a “fiver”.
Sweet Kiss won the race and the bettors were stunned
for his jockey fell off, a cadaver.
Frank suffered a heart attack on the last turn
and the horse was the only survivor.
Frank Hayes, undefeated, was buried with pomp.
“Sweet Kiss”, undefeated, retired.
Jockeys are short but have memories long-
None were willing to be her next rider.

John F. McCullagh
Death, Live On Camera

Never underestimate the power of hate
in the mind of a man with a gun.
The signs were all there, and all were ignored,
Until his planned evil was done.

A proud gay black man took a gun in his hand,
and authored his own revelation.
His anger and rage writ in blood on the street
with shell casings as the punctuation.

Two young lives destroyed; another in pain.
They were somebody’s daughter and son.
The cowardly killer then swallowed the barrel
and it ended as it had begun

Gather the ones you love in your arms
For each day may well prove your last one.
For hate, like a hunter, is stalking the land;
Only Fools think this is done.

John F. McCullagh
Dei Gratia

We were west of the Azores,
Five days out of New York,
when we spotted the Mary Celeste.
She was listing to Leeward
But still under sail
with no obvious sign of distress.

Briggs, Her captain, I knew
as a man good and true
And his shipmates
were capable men.
We hailed, but no answer,
So I send men aboard
To find out what had become of them.

Her cargo intact, just one lifeboat gone
And a rope that trailed aft in the sea.
Something had caused them
To abandon their ship
but why was a mystery to me.

There are storms on the Ocean
As winter draws near;
A sea grave was their likely fate
Or else they were drifting
Ever farther from shore
with nothing to eat on their plates.

I gave thanks to God’s grace
that cold, indifferent Fate’s
bony fingers had not touched on me
and I wept for my friends
of the Mary Celeste
who would never
come home from the sea.

John F. McCullagh
My mother forgot how to swallow.
Before that, she lost my face and my name,
Erased from her memory by sickness and age.
Her nurses complained she took too long to feed
They wanted a peg and a tube for the deed
My mother forgot how to swallow

She forgot her late spouse, disremembered her vow.
With the loss of the past there is no here and now.
Once she read to my child, then my girl read to her-
Until all the sounds were a meaningless blur
My mother forgot how to swallow

Jesus and Mary and her patron saint
Would loved to have helped her, so weak and so faint,
But she had forgotten the simplest prayer-
The beads in her hand little use to her here.

My mother forgot how to swallow

The night nurses found her while making their round
She was cold to the touch, no pulse to be found
She stared, eyes wide open, at the cross on the wall
Perhaps the Messiah had come after all.

John F. McCullagh
Dessert Storm

No one saw it coming,
that warm September day-
Not the workers at the pudding shack
Who mixed sweet treats for pay.

Not the Rookie at the pressure valves
Not the people in the town
It was the Rookies’ rank incompetence
That set in motion what went down.

Nine vats of Snack Time pudding
Exploded with a roar
Three hundred thousand gallons
Went oozing out the door

The workers never had a chance
On this, their final day
Ending up like Easter bunnies
For a giant’s holiday

That mighty wave of chocolate.
Like a Tsunami hit the town.
Sweet creamy death swept over them
Deliciously, they drowned.

Others turned and tried to flee.
They ran for all their worth.
The swift were lucky to escape
This scrumptious hell on earth

The survivors of the snack slide
Lost all they owned in town
It was a diabetics’ wet dream
Everything was chocolate brown.

It was the worst snacktastrophe
Our land had ever seen.
Obama sent marines with spoons
The air force dropped whipped cream.
John F. McCullagh
Spyer and Windsor
Often stayed late.
Out on the dance floor
enjoying their date.
Their love was their secret
concealed for some years
From nosy co-workers
and curious ears.
No ring could she give
To her love of all time,
Same Sex love was condemned
in Societies mind.
For richer, for poorer,
for better or worse.
Four decades they waited,
their vows to say first.
Then Death intervened
and put them apart.
Windsor barely survived
What they call &quot;Broken Heart&quot;
Now her day in court beckons
The Judgment day nears.
Were their vows a true marriage,
or not what it appears?
Will she owe Estate Tax-
Some three hundred grand-
Because she wed a woman
Instead of a man?

John F. McCullagh
Diamond In The Rough

My teammates don’t know.
Surely none can suspect-
When I leave from the game
I don’t go home direct.

My lockers my closet,
And in it I hide
my alternate lifestyle
That some wear with pride

Reporters surround me
on the locker-room prowl
I patiently answer,
dripping wet, in a towel.

I’m a likeable guy
And I don’t duck the press
And they never suspect
How I look in a dress.

My lockers my closet,
And in it I hide
my alternate lifestyle
That some wear with pride.

I’ve been a star
in the City for years.
If fans knew what I’m hiding
Would I still hear the cheers?

Sure, you see me around
With a girl on my arm-
But if they want more
I back off in alarm.
It’s kind of ironic-
fans wish they were me-
Could they live with the fear
of chance publicity?

My lockers my closet,
And in it I hide
my alternate lifestyle
That some wear with pride.

John F. McCullagh
Diamond In The Sky

He's number Fourteen in your program, "Mr. Cub" to long suffering fans. Ernie Banks was a soft spoken guy who launched many balls in the stands. A true hero who led by example; the face of the franchise, in fact. He never did play in the Series and there is some sadness in that.

Yet today is a great day for baseball in the heavenly precincts above. I'm sure, just like you, that they're bound to play two Once Ernie has tossed down his glove

John F. McCullagh
Diary Of An Old Woman

In my mind's eye
I can see her;
Her dark hair now silver grey,
He smooth child's cheek
now wrinkled
by the light of many days.

Such days as those
she never saw.
Informed upon
and dammed.
Anne Frank lies in
a common grave,
No tombstone bears her name.

Imagine, in a better world,
if her family had survived.
Somewhere, in anonymity,
she might still be alive.

John F. McCullagh
Dick Cheney (Won’t You Please Go Home)

Won't you go home, Dick Cheney, won't you go home
Don’t talk the whole term long
You started with a surplus, but now its spent
Leave poor Barrack alone

Remember that water boarding
That you approved- saying torture isn't wrong
Now our country’s in the tank and it’s you we have to thank
Dick Cheney, won't you please go home

Won't you go home, Dick Cheney, won't you go home
Don’t talk the whole term long
You started with a surplus, but now it’s spent
On your “forever” wars

Remember that last Election
We turned you out -and made you take the idiot back home
You were good for Halliburton but the rest of us are hurt
Dick Cheney won’t you please go home

When your own daughter don’t like Dick
That must make a man heartsick
Dick Cheney, won't you please go home

John F. McCullagh
Did The Irish Famine Teach Us Nothing?

Would the Famine have happened if the Irish were armed? 
Not with staves and pitchforks but with rifles and bombs. 
Would all of their grain and their British bound beef 
Been kept there in Ireland to give them relief?

We were serfs of a sort, slaves in our own land. 
Against British oppression we had no chance to stand. 
When our substance crop failed the rapacious landlord 
Seized our pitiful homesteads and made them sheepfolds.

With the green grass of Ireland their final repast 
Irish died by the thousands and their deaths weren't fast. 
Hunger, like Cancer, gnaws a man to the bone 
They lie now in mass graves without even a stone.

The poor Irish Catholic was a man with no rights. 
No wood for his coffin; No oil for his lights. 
What &quot;relief&quot; was provided was cause for despair 
as the hungry and the dying built roads to nowhere.

The coffin ships sailed and the old women weep. 
Some took the soup and renounce their belief. 
Such a strange Famine; it boggles the mind 
That food was exported- it was sure genocide.

Then we had no rights they were bound to respect. 
Their might gave them right to extort and collect. 
We were then subject to their whim and decree 
Till we learned to fight back and we made ourselves free.

John F. McCullagh
Domino Effect

Consider a planet the mirror of Earth,
a place that is nearly our twin,
where Cannabis is legal
and sugar is banned.
Where you can have “coke”
But not gin.

Would moonshiners distill
sour mash in their still?
Would junkies there “jones” for some “Cane”?
Would addicts have shakes
due to no frosted flakes.?
Would they murder and steal
for sweet sin?

There, those who like smokes
Would be left free to “toke”
While the sweet toothed
were facing hard time.

To rehab they’d go
And be fed sweet and low.
To keep sugar
Off of their minds

John F. McCullagh
Don’t Make Him Laugh

I said my plans out loud
and heard a deep throated chuckle.
I felt so foolish and exposed
and in a muckle of trouble.
For there’s many a slip
Twixt the cup and the lip
For those who chance to dare
And though you flee from
City to City
Fate will find you there.
So keep your secrets to your self
and shelter your designs.
Don’t dare to whisper on the wind
The debts you owe to Time.

John F. McCullagh
Don'Task, Don'T Tell

My buddy always had my back
While on Rotation in Iraq.
Now I hear, back in the States,
He trolls truck rest stops for his “dates”

Don’t ask, Don’t Tell
Do tell, don’t care.
They’ll drive us poor grunts to despair.
But folks in Congress just don’t care.

It didn’t matter in Iraq
If some soldier was a little WAC
He still fought against Al Qaida
while dreaming of a gay all- nighter.

Some men prefer the fairer sex,
some women do as well
Some soldiers lust for Derriere
Which ones? Don’t ask, Don’t tell.

A band of Lesbian Marines
might end the Afghan war.
The "Fighting 69th would win
And peace would reign once more.

John F. McCullagh
Doobie or not Doobie-
What was Prospero smoking?
Up on the ramparts of Elsinore
What was our Hamlet toking?
Did fair Ophelia steal his stash
and roll herself a Doobie?
Did she go off the deep end then
because she was a newbie?
Cannabis was to Shakespeare known
as a potent source of Hemp.
It may have made a dancing fool
out of old Will Kemp.
But please do not disturb his bones,
beware the potent curse.
The Bard of Avon had wit enough
without inhaling first.

John F. McCullagh
Down With The Bulletproof Stockings!

Imagine the outrage
If a band, all-male members,
Refuse to play tunes
for the opposite gender.

Imagine the uproar
The venue would face
For excluding a half
of their customer base.

"It's rank discrimination!"
The ladies would moan.
If the males got to listen
while the girls stayed at home.

Yet the Bulletproof Stockings,
That band that wears wigs,
Exclude guys from their concerts
Not just chauvinist pigs.

"It's a matter of Faith!"
The girl band members say;
No guys at their gigs!
No men hear them play.

Yet I've heard pious Pastry chefs
Don't get to choose.
If gay brides want a cake
It's a crime to refuse.

An Orthodox authoress
who published a tome
would be most put out
if male buyers stayed home.

So if girl musicians
seek public expression
They ought to think twice
about gender oppression.

It's great that they're keeping an orthodox home. 
But enough of these concerts For women alone.

John F. McCullagh
Downtown Train

Every morning on his way to work,
He saw her on the downtown train;
cute, lithe brunette with a perfect smile.
He didn't know her number or name.

She saw him on the downtown train
Every day on her way to work;
Tall handsome and professional,
But she was too shy to speak.

If they only had one mutual friend
Who thought them, for each other, right.
A friend to introduce them to
Shared sun kissed days and pleasured nights.

She 'd get off each day at Forty Second
while he stayed on till Herald Square.
Would this go on, till, old and grey,
They finally lacked the strength to care?

Then one day as she left the train
She accidentally dropped her phone.
He stooped to rescue it from the floor
And ran to catch her in the rain.

And that is how he learned her name
and got the number to her phone.
How they became inseparable
and began to build their dream of home.

She surely took an awful chance;
dropping her phone on a crowded train.
Yet, to be mistress of his heart
A Girl must know to play the game.

John F. McCullagh
Drinking To Remember

The bar was closed,
the dawn approached
like a grey and threatening sea.
He placed two glasses on the bar
one for him, one for me.

Black Bush shimmered in each glass
golden in half light
We proposed a toast to you
thirty years ago tonight.

That day We'd brought you to the church
and the graveyard just beyond.
Larger than life you always loomed
hard to believe you're gone.

They say that when a father dies
a boy becomes a man.
If it didn't happen right away
I hope you'll understand.

I'll never hear your voice again
or share a hug and kiss.
I'm drinking to remember
It was such a night as this.

John F. McCullagh
Drive Time

Double nickel in the rear view mirror

Lane lines ahead of me converging fast

keep eyes peeled on the road at all times-

not the scenery as it goes past.

Double Nickel in the rear view mirror

Lane lines ahead of me converging fast

A.M radio my true companion

A bunch of ditto heads that make me laugh

Double Nickel in the rear view mirror

At or past my apogee

each exit sign goes by more quickly

There’s an exit up ahead for me.

John F. McCullagh
Drop Off The Key, Lee

Mister Lee has taken his talents
To the City of Brotherly Love.
He rejected both New York and Texas.
Neither Rangers nor the Yanks land his glove..

His lifetime won- loss line in Texas
suggests that he can’t take the heat.
And why go and pitch for the Yankees
When they are one team he can beat.

They say Yank fans spit on his missus
And if that is true t’was unwise.
It soured the Lees on the City-
now Cashman, that elf, sits and cries.

Joe Blanton gets seventeen million
Cliff lee’s paid about Twenty five
With Halliday Hamels and Oswalt
They’re the best pitching money can buy.
Pavano’s not really an option

And Greinke would just rock and cry

Andy Pettite yearns now to retire

Is it time to give Joba a try?

John F. McCullagh
Druid Myst

The moon in shadow lay
in solstice's midnight hour.
Distant stars gave off dim light
how feeble seemed their powers.
Dark cloaked Druids skulked about,
They moved from tree to tree
gathering the mistletoe
for their dread ceremony.
Primal terror filled my veins,
the blood borne juice of fear.
What should happen to you and I
if the Priests should find us here?

John F. McCullagh
The crops are drooping in my fields.
No rain again today.
My precious topsoil, dry as dust,
threatens to blow away.
It makes a farmer feel like Job
to be afflicted in this way.
No rain dance I can do will help.
I lack the words to pray.
We’re victims of a climate change
which makes the land too dry.
Nor is hope on the horizon
from the high blue, empty, sky.

John F. McCullagh
Dylan Thomas

The first time that he saw the girl
he proposed right on the spot.
It helped to get his courage up
that he’d had many a beer and shot.

Theirs would not be a summer's love
that flares and quickly fades away.
It was a fifteen round affair
where shadows lengthened with the day.

Fidelity, not their chief concern.
They had three children and many a glass
The artist was consumed by drink.
He chased skirt at every chance

He was drowning in encouragement
though no one ever needed less.
Some say he was consumed by fears
of the shadowy unwelcome guest.

On the day that he began to die,
to slip into last last good night
He nearly drank the tavern dry
Eighteen shots of the water of life.

He was comatose when she arrived,
the dancer who he took for bride.
'Is the bloody man still alive?'
'Just barely'. the attending nurse replied.

Slowly, surely, he drifted off
like a vessel making way
Dylan headed for the west.
no rage remained to save the day.

John F. McCullagh
Dysmorphia

To others, she appeared so fair,
Her blonde hair long and silky
Her eyes intelligent and kind,
her complexion clear and milky.

She saw herself quite differently
in the mirror of her mind.
She thought her breasts a little small,
with a much too large behind.

So, unhappy with her looks,
she stayed apart, alone.
She turned down dates from hopeful mates
and stayed most nights at home

So she sought out the surgeons knife
to perfect her derriere.
The infection that she died from
is, fortunately, quite rare.

Our ladies should be happy
with the gifts that nature gave.
Not risk all on a tragic end
while being Fashion's slave

John F. McCullagh
Eagle

Soaring on the updrafts
From the canyon far below
My silhouette is made a shadow
by the evening sun’s red glow.

Between heaven and earth suspended
I hover in the sky
My eyes searching intently
as my dinner scurries by.

I pitch myself into a dive
My talons slash and kill
Hunting from the evening sky
Has never lost its thrill

John F. McCullagh
Early Morning Bar Room, 1919

I stared, stupidly, at his head and the pool of red he bled from the brass rail down onto the barroom floor.

Had it been a half an hour
He, so cocksure of his power, had first set foot inside the barroom door?

I'd been alone but for the Doc a Presbyterian Scott who just come from a hard delivery.

Mom and child were doing well but the Doctor looked like hell so I sat him down and gave the man some tea.

I 'm the Pub man's assistant and my job that Winter's morning was cleaning up the place for this day's trade.

Had I been out in the snug I'd have never met this lug who is lying on the floor fit for the grave.

I am Irish from Tyrone, He was from Lancaster-shire. To his thinking I was a blight on English soil.
He was spoiling for a fight
which he started with a right
that sent me sprawling
on the barroom floor.

He said 'Get off the floor,
and I'll treat you to some more.'
'You stupid Mick! '
His boon companion smiled.

I'm not one to shun a fight
when I'm firmly in the right
and these arms were toned
by years of quarrying stone.

Was it surprise I saw
when He learned I'm a southpaw.
Satisfying was the sound
of fist on chin.

As he commenced his trip to earth
It was the foot rail caught him first
He cracked his skull
and then he was no more.

His friend ran for the police
as his pulse and breathing ceased
Doc looked up at me and said
'This won't go well'

'Take my bicycle and flee
Off to Scotland, listen to me,
unless you fancy
dancing on the wind.'

So I rode like one possessed
on the narrow winding roads
Early winter darkness
coming down.

After, I worked on dairy farms
and spent three years in the mines.
Eventually, the case grew cold
and went away.

I emigrated to the States
where they too have
their loves and hates
but the Irish are accepted in a way.

John F. McCullagh
Once upon an Earth lit night,
On NASA Moon base two,
I chanced to spy a cute Brunette –
A space Cadet named Yu.

Her eyes were dark and beautiful
Deep as a lunar mare-
And, free from bra and gravity-
hers breasts beyond compare.

Love in Microgravity
Is a curious affair
She brought me to her snuggle tube
And she restrained me there.

She straddled on the launching pad
And docking was effected
And after a few awkward strokes
Our cadence was perfected.

The Moon Child that resulted
From our friendly first embrace
Forced Yu to have to shuttle back
to Earth from outer space.

It seems that Human embryos
Need gravity to grow.
Else their hearts would be too weak
Their reflexes too slow.

So, like Salmon, we go back
to where our mothers birthed.
Procreation’s problematic
beyond the bounds of Earth.
We named our daughter Luna
-Unoriginal, I know.
And now we’re out near Jupiter
getting busy on Io.

By John F. McCullagh

John F. McCullagh
Eclipse

As our solar system moved through space
It chanced upon a region where
A cloud of dark matter, like a shroud,
was wrapped around our Earth so fair.

It blotted out the stars of night
It dimmed the light of Sun and Moon
Crops grew stunted or not at all,
Mankind faced its mortal doom.

Rigel, Sirius, Vega gone?
Blotted out of Human sight?
Arcturus and Capella too
failed to pierce the veil of night.

Ignorance of every stripe
Began to fight for center stage:
Ignorance both Left and Right
spilled blood in their righteous rage.

I looked true North in the night sky
and saw Polaris still on station.
The darkness began to dissipate.
Tranquility returned to our Nation.

Some few thanked God
with praise and Prayer
More raised their eyes to Heaven's bowl;
grateful to see the stars still there.

Dark deeds; Dark times, and desperate schemes,
We had been put through Hell by them.
Now bright sunshine warmed our days;
At night we saw the stars again.

John F. McCullagh
Eight Minutes

High above the Canyon’s edge,
Far above the ancient clay,
The helicopter hovers there
Like a dragonfly at play.

With my jet pack on my back
I coolly, calmly step away.
Gain separation from the blades,
Freefall starts my epic day.

On stubby wings the jet packs fire
I’m Daedalus in the morning light.
I soar across the canyon’s rim.
Laughing like some hell born sprite

One hundred eighty miles an hour,
The wind whips cold despite the sun
I glide toward my landing zone
The jet packs sputter and are done.

My parachute has been deployed
My guide ropes turn me for my drop.
My wings are just a dead weight now
I touch down one the Mesa top.

At Kitty Hawk that fateful day.
This must be what the brothers felt
Kindred souls who sought to fly
By using wings that wouldn’t melt..

John F. McCullagh
Elementary Logic

Gaius is a man

All men are Mortal

sucks to be Gaius

John F. McCullagh
Embedded

How can I write the story
of a battle fought and won,
when lying close beside me
Is the body of my son?

He was ordered to this field,
a place where his unit bled.
Wounded, left to die,
when even surgeons fled.

The sole object of my interest
Is this, my oldest son.
Does it matter Lee was beaten?
That the Union forces won?

All around me is death’s harvest-
for him, a fruitful one.
I will send you home to mother
and be cursed for what I’ve done.
The photographers are roaming

Through the fields of blood and gore

Taking pictures of the fallen.

They are bringing home the war.

(This is the true story of George Wilkinson, a correspondent for the New York Times and his son, Lt. Bayard Wilkinson, late of the army of the Potomac. It is based in part on the article he wrote for the New York Times on 7/4/1863. This day saw Lee defeated and retreating from Gettysburg and the fall of Vicksburg. It was the decisive turning point of the Civil War)

John F. McCullagh
Empty Nest

Our house this night is full of life,
both kids up in their rooms.
We're safe and warm from the harrowing storm
with its lightening streaks and booms.
Yet soon I know, both have to go,
to school, to work, to life.
Then this will be an empty nest
with just me and my wife.

How do birds feel, when, freshly fledged,
their young depart forever.
Do they sing more somberly
when the chicks are not together?
We're creatures of habit, like those birds
I see when we're in the park.
I'll catch myself gazing up the stairs
when both their rooms are dark.

John F. McCullagh
Es Kann Hier Nicht Geschehen

- Gedicht von John F. McCullagh

Sara und Stephen waren von einem deutlichen Rennen,
zur falschen Zeit leben, und an der falschen Stelle.
Als Hitler die Macht übernahm, erleichterte sie sich gegen Ängste des anderen.
'Deutschland ist zivilisiert, es hier nicht passieren kann.'

Wenn schimpfte der Kanzler gegen Zigeuner und Juden
'Er ist einfach zu spielen Politik' war ihre vernünftige Aussicht.
Doch Hass nahm Wurzel; die braunen Hemden hatten freien Lauf
Und die Wähler hatten Grund zur Rue, was sie getan hatten.

Hitler kam für ihre Waffen und sie sanftmütig halten.
Wenige dann dachte die starke onrushing Flut zu widerstehen.
'Die Polizei wird uns schützen, Sara, meine Liebe.'
'Das ist Beethovens Geburtshaus, es ist hier nicht passieren kann.'

Das waren sehr harte Zeiten, das Schlimmste, was wir je gesehen habe.
Reiche Juden wurden für die Pelze übel genommen, die sie trugen.
'Sie kosten uns den Krieg, sie sind Verräter, es klar.'
'Sara, keine Sorge, es hier nicht passieren kann.'

Die Feinde des Kanzlers verschwand in der Nacht
Und er begann, von einem tausendjährigen Reich zu sprechen.
Er zensiert die Zeitungen; beide Links und Rechts.
Und Glas durch die Straßen einer Novembernacht übersät.

Mit Hindenburg tot, wer war dort stehen gelassen?
Wer hatte Wille, der verzogene kleine Mann zu widerstehen?
Perves trug Triangles, trug Juden Sterne
Beide verloren ihre Rechte nach Deutschland Gesetze.

Sara und Stephen waren geladen, wie Fracht,
auf einem Zug nach Dachau durch Befehl des Staates gebunden.
'Ich bin sicher, dass wir befreit werde, Sara, meine Liebe.'
Wir sind eine zivilisierte Rasse, dies hier nicht passieren kann.

Stephen arbeitete als Sklave aber zumindest am Leben geblieben.
Er wurde von den Russen im Mai Fünfundvierzig befreit. 
Sara, seine Frau, hatte ein weit grausamer Schicksal; 
Sie wurde von den Nazis Mandat zum Duschen geschickt.

Zurück in Berlin, sah Stephen mit seinen eigenen Augen 
dass das 'Tausendjährige Reich' war ein Gewebe von Lügen 
Zuerst von Braunhemden plünderten, bombardiert dann im Krieg 
Stephen dachte: 'Das ist nicht mehr zu Hause.'

Jetzt Stephen ist alt, lebt hier in den Staaten. 
Er sieht mit Schrecken an diesen beiden Kandidaten. 
Es scheint wie ein Alptraum er durch vorher gelebt. 
Eine Krise kommt und es wird Krieg geben.

John F. McCullagh
Et Tu?

The Ides of March had come
but its Sun was not yet cold
when Spurinna reminded me
what his augury had foretold

Some good men tried to warn me
About the risks I take-
But Caesar has no need of guards
I look Death in the face.

Calpurnia asked me not to go
Based on her silly dream
But the Parthian war won’t be derailed
By some Republican’s scheme

The supplicants surround me with petitions,
Bur I, impatient, moved to turn away.
Casca grabbed the draping of my toga
and bared me, awkwardly, to start the fray.

The first dagger found my flesh
and left a superficial wound.
I wrested the dagger from his hands
and swept the blade to clear some room.

They are too many that surround me.
Too many of their thrusts strike home
Brutus my son, “Et Tu, Brute”
I cover my face to die alone.

Bleeding, powerless, dying,
No one must see me as I lay.
My dignity must be preserved
for I am uncommon clay.

John F. McCullagh
Euphrion’s Son

On the Plain at Marathon
We stood in Darius’ way.
An outnumbered band of Athenians
who the Medians sought to slay.
They had first crushed the Ionians
Then put Eretria to the Torch.
Wherever Darius conquered
the bleeding earth was scorched.

Our Hoplites held the high Ground
and penned the Persians in.
For several days a stalemate reigned.
Neither side could win.
But when the Persians spit their force
and sailed on a friendly tide.
Our hand was forced
there was but one course
if Athens was not to die.
Our Phalanx moved against each wing
of the Median horde.
Though numerous, they were lightly armed
against our spears and swords.
We burned their ships and slew their men
Their Panic turned the tide.
Aeschylus seemed to be everywhere
urging on our side.
A Legend holds Pheidippides
To Athens then made haste
to proclaim: “Rejoice, We conquer!”
at the end of his last race.

John F. McCullagh
I'll sleep within these woods tonight,
That much, at least, is plain.
I'd hiked for several hours
And not much day remained.
The shadows on the ground grow long
As it's that time of year
when leaves on branches are few or none
and shadows sinister appear.
There is a clearing up ahead;
A friendly glow is seen
A solitary camper sits
beneath an Evergreen.
His smile is warm and friendly
He bades me to remain
with gestures warm and welcoming
Speech lyrical and strange..
I share with him a simple meal
Of pan fried fish and beer.
The meal seems like a miracle
As I know of no lake near.
Dark night has come and both are glad
To spread our bedrolls down
I sleep the night like one who's dead.
I wake, and no one's near.
No sign of my host or his tent
No sign that he was here.
I shake my head in wonder
And pack my roll to go.
What the Evergreen has witnessed
is not for me to know.

John F. McCullagh
Exhale

She took my breath away
just by her being near
Her long red ginger hair
Her dangerous curves, her sparkling pair
of eyes that chanced to look my way
Just as the wind snatched my toupee
(That knocked the wind out of my sail)
That left me paunchy, bald and pale.

I guess I might as well exhale.

John F. McCullagh
Exhuming Pablo

In the grove of Isla Negra,
his beloved by his side,
ilies Pablo Neruda-
Does his grave conceal a lie?

Forty years since he departed,
Four decades in the clay,
A Judge in Santiago
calls him forth to light of day.

This poet was a mortal soul
whose love illumined his lines.
Was he murdered in the hospital,
or did cancer end his time?

He said Love's time is brief
and is much longer forgotten-
But he could extend its lease
With Love sonnets he'd begotten.

Did Pinochet eliminate
The poet left alone.
He was lying in the hospital,
Defenseless, it was known.

Did a needle give that lover's pinch
That hurts, but is desired?
Or did Cancer gnaw his bones
relentless like wildfire?

The bones will tell, They always do
Though mortal flesh decays
So we disturb the poets' sleep
This resurrection day.

John F. McCullagh
Eye Of The Tiger

Tiger, Tiger burning bright
hunts his prey by neon light
Real or bleached, you know the kind
big up front with a sweet behind..

Tiger, tiger, none too bright
Left his cell phone in plain sight
When Elin saw his contact list
She grabbed his driver in her fist.

Four hundred yards straight off the tee
Tiger drives that easily
But when his little wife went clubbing
His face and lawn both took a drubbing

Tiger Tiger burning bright
Doesn’t like the bright spotlight
Yet on his off days he’d resort
To pros who play a different sport

Tiger Tiger made a tape
of Tiger 'eagaling' his date
It came into the hands of 'Vivid'
If they release it he'll be Livid

Tiger, tiger lost Gillette
And Gatorade sent their regrets
Now he’s hawking Trojan’s Wares
and lady Clairol for Blonde hair.

John F. McCullagh
Faded Glory

Like a treasured heirloom painting
dulled by passing time,
it its colors, sadly faded,
this tricolor of mine.
Once crimson red, now cinnamon,
The blue an aqualine,

When Liberty was naked
We draped her in its folds.
The boys in blue held this high
in times that try men’s souls.
Let not the flag of freedom drop
nor linger in the dust.
Let faded glory be restored-
In Liberty we trust.

John F. McCullagh
Faded Photographs

Some pictures hang upon my wall
Of baseball players from the past-
Gionfriddo’s catch of DiMaggio’s ball-
Lou Gehrig standing at the mike-
Babe Ruth pitching in the Bronx-
And the one place that links them all.

They happened at the lumberyard
The place on River Avenue
The place where Bombers came to play
Now sad, diminished, and by Fall-
a victim of the wrecking ball.

One other theme is intertwined
Within the pictures on my wall
Each enshrines the final time
These men enjoyed a curtain call..

Babe was pitching his last time
The season ender (33’)
He never pitched another game
A complete game shutout
Against the Sox.

Gehrig speaking at the mike
A hot July 4th holiday
At home plate for the final time
He stood on the unaccustomed side

Gionfriddo’s speed won the game
By making his miraculous catch
But next day he sat on the bench
And never played a game again
How bittersweet these moments are
for a scrub or a superstar
To know, at last, you’ve reached the end
To still have done the best you can.

Their time has passed, these men have died
And now their park has seen its day
I’ve only photographs to show
Perfection never fades away.

John F. McCullagh
Fair Exchange

We collided that day in the market,
old fart and a pretty colleen.
Your eyes were the green of an emerald,
Your long tresses as red as I’ve seen.
Your keen hands, at the time, slipped my notice-
as they pilfered my wallet away.
If you don’t mind, dear, I’d like back my photos.
The cash you earned, making my day.

John F. McCullagh
Fair Exchange?

The Young resent us Oldsters, we Seniors, stooped and grey.  
We Boomers hold the bulk of worldly goods, at least today.  
The game is rigged against them- resentment rules the day.  
The Young have debts they can't discharge and likely cannot pay.  
The Old likewise resent the Young their beauty, strength and speed.  
We, whose days are growing short, look at their Youth with greed.  
Stocks and bonds are wonderful; but their compensation wanes  
When I am cold in summer's heat and live in constant pain.  
If only to be young again, with Ann, beneath the stars.  
That Fifty Seven Chevy was more fun than modern cars.  
The Young seem to resent us and I find it passing strange-  
I'd yield this wealth for youth and health. It's a more than fair exchange.

John F. McCullagh
Fall To Earth

The stubborn little Maple leaf
held on when all its fellows fled.

They carpeting the ground beneath
a vast lushscape of gold and red.

Leaf held on through wind and rain,
the last survivor of its race.

Leaf held on past Turkey day
maintaining there its pride of place.

Then Leaf grew lonely, I suppose-
Like the summer's final rose.

Leaf envied then the flakes of snow
Who fluttered past to their repose.

Then, just as winter came to call,
Leaf felt a tug and then a snap.

Flying, tumbling on the winds
Fall to Earth. Fade to black.
John F. McCullagh
Fallen Oak

That storm took down my neighbor's oak
and smashed the light post too.
They fell across and blocked our street,
So no cars can get through.

Once lofty branches block the walks-
(That tree was very tall.)
The slab of concrete at its' root
was lifted by its fall.

The tree and post are obstacles
With which we must contend.
The victims of a fury
we can scarcely comprehend.

How fast the darkness did descend-
The rain in torrents fell.
We heard the crack of splintered wood-
and crashing steel as well.

The North part of our street has light.
a Sodium Vapor Glow.
But south, the Darkness quick descends,
There no cars dare go.

My house, for now, still bathed in light
Our tree survived the storm.
But darkness was made visible
by a sudden touch of Fall..

John F. McCullagh
Falling In Snow On A Frosty Evening

I’ve fallen and I bruised my rump.
I was out shoveling near the stump.
I was trying to get the driveway free.
A plow had just come by, you see.

I had a shovelful to toss
When suddenly, my footing lost,
I was sailing in the air
destined for the snow pile there.

I have bruises on both knees
My ribs are sore, it hurts to sneeze.
I think I should have stayed inside
And worst of all -It hurt my pride.

John F. McCullagh
Family Tree

In every proud Victorian home

There was a tree ablaze in light

Bedecked with gold and garland strands

to celebrate on Christmas night.

Again in times close to our own

In every decent Christian home

A little creche gained in favor

to celebrate our infant savior.

The years speed past for you and me

I think back half a century

To when I was a tiny child

agog at my first Christmas tree.

Among the decorations there

Six small orbs of hand blown glass

From Mom and Dad’s first Christmas tree

They were a precious legacy.
That home is but a memory, true

From those six orbs we have lost two

From other hearths now trees arise

to sparkle in our children’s eyes.

John F. McCullagh
Famine Road

Once these hands made music; never more!
Oh, to have my bow and fiddle would be grand.
I have lost my home and all possessions
ever since the Famine gripped our land.
Now I place stone on stone upon this hill.
My fingers cracked and bloodied shifting shale.
To earn a crust of bread we labor daily
To build this road to nowhere they command.
At gunpoint, they have stripped our fields of grain;
exporting food from this our starving land.
They hate us for our stubborn superstition;
We poor wraiths who suffer like the dammed.
We labor without hope upon this hill.
Our sweat and blood expended- but for what?
A road to nowhere built straight and true.
a monument to those who God forgot.

John F. McCullagh
Farenheit 451

Remember, the firemen are rarely necessary

When books are replaced with Kindles and Nooks, and content resides on the cloud. It is relatively easy to delet certain works at the whim of the haughty and proud.

If libraries falter, wither and die The poor will lose access to the printed word. Ten percent of the market will quickly dry up and the price of a book gets absurd.

Remember, the firemen are rarely necessary.

The pleasure we had in turning each page as our minds raced ahead to the end. Short battery life never hindered our quest when Dick, Jane and Spot were our friends.

A storm on the Sun bringing ionized rays and digital files are undone. and force us to search yellow crumbling pages for rumors of Kipling and Donne.

Remember, the firemen are rarely necessary.

Was Bradbury right? Should we all memorize the words born of our favorite pen? Imagine reciting Shakespeare’s Hamlet by heart so that silence won’t win in the end.

John F. McCullagh
Farewell My Michelob

Americans, in general, are still fond of their beers-consuming many million twelve ounce cans.
Still, when you get right to the bottom some famous brands have been forgotten and soon they’ll fade away like Schlitz and Piels.

Folks these days prefer the” crafts”, served in pitchers or on draft. Low calorie is the order of the day. While some people live the High Life, it matters not to my life. Old Sam Adams smiles when I say cheers.

Budweiser, in dismay, sees its sales flat then fade away -down seven million barrels in one year Old Milwaukee’s running dry, they are barely getting by Michelob has been forgotten, it appears.

Do you remember Schaeffer beer and Rheingold in a can- mass market in the golden age of brew.? Those names fell by the wayside and are no longer heard in Bayside. the folks on Bell are craving something new.

The calories must be light, because our jeans are way too tight. served it with orange, with change back from a ten. We’ll stand at the bar and reminisce about the girls we never kissed remembering the fun we had back then.

John F. McCullagh
Farewell My Valentine

As the Rose is the flower of flowers,  
Exalted above all the rest,  
Their color denoting desire  
Which words alone cannot express.  
Some shades are symbols of friendship.  
Some others connote happiness.  
Some buds are a byword for passion,  
and the reddest of blooms says it best.  
A first love is never forgotten-  
unless you forget yourself first.  
It lingers in mind like the taste of your lips.  
It is either a blessing or curse.  
We were little more than adolescents  
That day we embraced by the shore.  
Though the tides haven't changed  
It has been many years  
And now I will see you no more.  
My tears are my heart's lamentations  
For a Love that was too long repressed.  
I place my red rose on your casket.  
The reddest of blooms says it best.

John F. McCullagh
Farewell To A Rose

Something there is that doesn't love a rose;
The biting wind, the unrelenting rain,
The first hint of the coming winter's chill
That will not suffer flowers to remain.

Something there was that did not love our Rose
The renegade cells whose blood destroying will
Seeped into the bones and her soft tissues
and on the warmest day left our Rose chilled.

Now our Rose lies still in her Sunday best
Her hands composed for prayer and ever sleep.
Something there was that didn't let Rose live.
A circumstance that makes a grown man weep.

John F. McCullagh
Farewell To My Fans

A farewell to my fans

When I am just a faded memory,
and my dimensions shift in your mind’s eye-
think back upon the nights you spent at me
around a field of green beneath the sky.

For you were here the night back in 04’
The night that Jeter dove into my stands
When Yanks and Red Sox played a thirteenth Frame
he caught the ball but had to leave the game.

And you were here when A-Rod hit three bombs
Against the cy young candidate Colon-
you stood expectant in my left field stands
To catch the fourth if ever it should land..

Who can forget old Freddy and his pan-
The “Ancient Mariner” of Yankee fans
He wanders through my aisles just like a vendor-
He bangs the drum more slowly this September.

I’ve been the field where Ruth and Mantle played-
where DiMaggio stood out at center stage.
I’ve been the home plate where the luckiest man
bowed out before his disbelieving fans.

I’ve played host often to a Series game
My champions have added to my fame.
The shadows long upon my infield face
As days grew short and cool at Autumn’s pace.

I was the place George Herman lay in state
When he lost his fight for life in 48’
Thousands of you wandered past his bier
(the only one he didn’t want, I hear).
But now my time has come, they say I'm through
And I think hard what Gehrig had to do-
He passed on the baton from failing hands
So I too say my farewell to the fans.

John F. McCullagh
Fatal Blow

The decedent was in perfect health
As all our tox screens show.
No visible wounds,
No blunt force trauma,
Believe me, We would know.
A “Dear John” letter
Found near the corpse
revealed she had to go.
The coroner ruled
this loss of Love
had proved the fatal blow.

John F. McCullagh
Fatal Victory

The moon shone full that fatal night
When Stonewall and his men
were returning from a scout
around their former friends.
The brightness of the risen moon
Put them in silhouette.
The pickets rose and fired;
an action they would soon regret.
Stonewall Jackson was unhorsed,
a Minnie ball in his arm.
The surgeons had to amputate.
One week later he was gone.
It marred a famous victory,
A masterpiece of Lee’s,
when Jackson crossed over the river
to rest in the shade of the trees.

John F. McCullagh
Father's Day

My father left our family-
Many years since have gone by.
So suddenly did he depart
that we never said good bye.

I’m sure he said I love you
as he struggled up the stairs.
Just as surely did he mention us
within his final prayers.

But when the fatal stroke arrived
And flooded through his brain
He cried out for his mother-
because men are all the same

Her shadow at his deathbed stood
As she watched her last son go.
She would lead him to a better place,
leaving us to mourn below.

Life is so very beautiful,
Death seems peaceful and serene.
The method of his exit
The most graceful I have seen.

John F. McCullagh
Felicity

Her face is the face of an angel, if angels, as such, there be.
Her hair is a crown of platinum gold and she sings her words softly to me.
Her eyes are twin pools of cerulean blue; her lips wear a pink coral hue.
She offered her hand; we embraced in a dance as timeless as Heaven must be.
To possess such a treasure you would sell all you owned, for she is the pearl of great price.
Her Love is a treasure that never will rust; I've no need for another's advice.
My heart's own desire I held in my arms; we embraced in a passionate kiss.
The power and glory of all the world else is as nothing compared to this.

John F. McCullagh
Fifty Words For Snow

In the arctic wastes where the Inuit tribe hunts caribou and fights to survive,
I have been told since long ago that tribe has fifty words for “snow”
That seemed superfluous to me- Fifty words for one commodity!
If I was born an Eskimo, I’d have fifty words to learn and know

I do most of the shoveling here, my wife and children cheer me on.
The winter lingers long and drear, some days it seems the Sun is gone.
Despite the calendar I greatly fear that blessed spring is nowhere near
Tomorrow, the radio makes clear, we’re expecting six more inches here.

Some snow is like a sugary mist, granulated and sublime,
Quite useless for a snow ball fight, for that you need the packing kind.
The worst is the wet sodden snow, the kind that threatens a heart attack.
It’s difficult to lift and throw; it hurts the arms and strains the back.

I told my wife I now know why they need fifty words for snow.
I have a few choice words I’d add; words the children shouldn’t know.
Those Inuit folk who fight to survive in the land of snow and ice-
They have fifty words for snow, only one of which is nice.

John F. McCullagh
DEATH felt a tug upon his line.
He gave the reel some play.
Down in the depths the struggle commenced
This was some soul's dying day.

Down in the depths of deep despair
His victim fought the hook.
DEATH had used pleasure as his lure
oft that was all it took.

DEATH sat back in his fishing chair
aboard his Yacht "Mort Du".
He waited for acceptance;
for the struggle to be through.

DEATH smiled a hideous fleshless smile.
What did one mortal say?
"If your work is your hobby,
It's like you never worked a day."

The Sun rode low in the western sky.
A certain chill invades the air.
DEATH felt the strain in his sinewy arms.
And He shifted in his chair.

It's Time, DEATH thought, to end this sport.
"You will not get away.
I'm glad you made it interesting
Now perhaps it's time to pray."

Just then DEATH felt the line go slack:
Cut through upon a submerged rock.
His prey, still burdened by his hook,
still had time upon the clock.

DEATH surveyed the darkening sea.
as twilight settled on the brine.
DEATH took it philosophically;
We'll meet again another time.
John F. McCullagh
Fight Like A Girl

Before he spoke, I think I knew, 
but did not dare to say its name. 
The swollen lymph node was a clue 
My self exam told much the same.

Twenty eight and newly wed- 
What will my husband say and do? 
I face the loss of both my breasts. 
Will he leave me? Are we through?

When I am ripped apart by knife 
for my double mastectomy. 
Will I no longer be his wife? 
Will he no more lie close to me?

Where once I had such golden hair 
A bright bandanna I will wear. 
I’ve put my trust in my Physician 
To chart the course and gain remission

My prognosis remains uncertain- 
We don’t know yet if it has spread. 
The doctors fear I’ll be infertile, 
I’ll be a favorite Aunt instead.

When fighting like a girl, I battle 
Many nights I question “why?” 
The monster seeks to test my mettle. 
First defeat it, and then I'll cry.

For Jeanette, our favorite aunt, forever in our hearts.
John F. McCullagh
Finding Beauty

Is Beauty like pornography?  
-identified by sight.  
Is the 'eye of the beholder' school  
the one that got it right?

For them a pleasing symmetry,  
of eyes, lips, breasts and hips  
is ample justification  
to launch a thousand ships.

For them beauty is genetic,  
gifted by heredity  
you get it from your parents-  
much like their insanity.

For most, its unattainable-  
that certain je ne sais quoi-  
Still women spend a fortune  
on beauty in a jar.

Lust for curves? -drive the Taconic  
or the Pacific Coast Highway.  
They both boast scenic beauty  
and have fewer tolls to pay.

Instead seek beauty in her eyes,  
the mirror of her soul.  
For they will remain beautiful  
as together you grow old

John F. McCullagh
Finding Her Voice

She had been condemned to silence
since the stroke, two years before.
The lovely lyric voice I loved
seemed vanished evermore.

Locomotion came back slowly.
Just this spring I saw her smile
Still, my girl remained in shadow,
sadly silent all the while.

Her new therapist was hopeful
That she could be taught to sing.
I doubted it was possible-
She couldn't say a thing.

Two hours, nearly every day
the girl who wore my ring
with her therapist accompanist
keep struggling to sing.

I never thought that
'row your boat'
could be my favorite song
Until I heard her sing it,
for the first time on her own.

When all my prayers were answered
I no longer felt alone.
That day the girl who wears my ring
made it all the way back home.

John F. McCullagh
Finger-Painted Red

The trees outside their classroom door
so recently were green.
Now they all are bare and brown;
great evil they have seen.

I cannot, will not, speculate
what drove that youth insane:
or why he murdered children
then put a bullet in his brain.

The Season now is dreary;
Christmas greetings go unsaid;
Presents never to be opened
and even Hope seems dead.

A grateful Father hugs his girl,
but innocence has fled..
The classroom is an abattoir:
Finger-painted Red.

John F. McCullagh
First Kiss

We met for drinks and music
in a quiet little bar.
A singer, Reno Sweeney,
was the evening’s featured star.
Bob and Shelia never showed,
throwing us together:
You, a dark eyed beauty,
loquacious and quite clever.
I, your unexpected swain,
With eyes an emerald treasure.

Later at the Piper’s inn
We sat before the fire
You sipped on your white Russian
I drank my Pinot Noir.
I could not know, did not foresee
Our future in my glass:
Our sensual adventures
On rooftops and on grass.
Our joys, our sorrows, and our fears
Which then could not be guessed-
Just your sweet face upturned to me
anticipating to be kissed.

John F. McCullagh
First Love

There are loves that are inseparable,
loves that never leave.
Loves that can define us
This much I do believe.
I remember well my own first “love”.
A Love I brought to bed.
I brought along a flashlight too
To discern the words Love said.
When all my family was asleep
from my pillow I’d retrieve
My treasure from the Library
And I’d begin to read.
That was my first chapter book,
A mystery, I recall.
Of all the words I’ve read or writ
It was the start of all.
I like to find that book again
and hold in one more time.-
and in the touch and smell of it
Recall a simpler time.

John F. McCullagh
First To Die

“Doc, over here.” I heard them cry.
I raced on black volcanic sand,
bullets nipping at my heels,
my medic-aid kit in my hand.

“Its Mike Strank, they got him bad.”
Mike was down, writhing in pain.
He was losing blood
and awfully pale.

Shielding his body with my own,
in a depression in the ground
I cut away his Khaki shirt.
Until the entry wound was found.

A sucking wound, an evil sign-
red frothing bubbles from his chest.
A styrette of Morphine- all I had
to ease the pain of every breathe.

Suribachi loomed above us.
Barely had a week gone by
since this man had helped to raise
the Stars and stripes up to the sky.

Now he was dying, fading fast.
A grave awaited, far from home.
There was nothing I could do
except not let him die alone.

John F. McCullagh
For A Granddaughter

Since the Days of Rome,
It's been well known
to the point of certainty.-
That a home that has a Julia
is a happy home indeed.

A Julia is a gentle soul,
unfailingly wise and kind.
She'll barely even raise her voice-
If fed and changed on time.

She'll have her mother's beauty
Her voice a songbird's call..
I think I hear her warming up
In the nursery down the hall

So Jennifer, you've given us
a J.E.M. to hold, a treasure.
May she never cause a moments grief,
But always be a pleasure.

John F. McCullagh
For Edgar Allan Poe

She was careful that she was not seen
There, in the graveyard,
deep in the night.
A single rose in her left hand
A bottle of Cognac in her right.
She knew the path to his grave by heart,
How could it be otherwise?
The two of them had shared one heart,
Now in his tomb the Master lies.
Libation poured upon the stone.
She wets her lips with Hennessey
He, of course, Edgar Allen Poe
She, of Course, his Annabelle Lee

John F. McCullagh
For Elizabeth

"Beautiful" she said;
And none can her gainsay.
The poetess who spoke,
then, in quiet, passed away.
Cossetted within her husband's arms,
frail and small in death's repose,
Never again would she put pen to paper.
No more sonnets would her art compose.
Her illnesses had dogged her all her life.
Only morphine kept the pain at bay.
It also gave to her a heightened sense
of the beauty of mundane reality.
How vividly did her expressive eyes
Put words to thoughts and thoughts to
printed page.
She was the wild enthusiast of life,
whose poetry was the spirit of the age.

John F. McCullagh
For God And Country

"Did I hesitate a moment? Did I stop and wonder why? We were ordered to attack from some blunderer up high. We were all, I think, afraid. Who wouldn't be right then? Those Russians were entrenched and had artillery with them. We must have looked magnificent on our chargers riding high As we rode for God and Country, we knew Death was standing by. I saw my brother Henry die and more brave lads besides. We dressed the line and galloped on, We who were about to die. My horse was shot from under me and that threw me to the sod. The battle sounded distant and my left arm felt quite odd. Some Shrapnel cut my face and thigh, but I saw many worse. Some men called for their mothers, others raged and cursed. Our gallant charge was broken by effective cannon fire. There were many horses riderless like the one that I acquired. When I got back behind our lines, I thanked my equine friend. Then I realized he'd been Henry's mount when this travesty began. I'm sure there will be an inquiry into how this was misplayed. It is then I'll tell my tale about our murdered light brigade."

John F. McCullagh
Forbidden

A casual glance, a gentle touch,
It stops at that, we know it must.
A chaste embrace, an offered cheek
which I dryly kiss and count it sweet.

Once we’d danced around a flame-
an older man, a willing maid.
Both comfortable in our own skin
In secret we began our sin.

I know your body like my wife’s
But she was elsewhere, I recall
Your husband, too, was on the road
When I, like Adam, had my fall.

We speak of nothings, jobs, careers,
Not of our existential fears.
Celebrity splits, Horrid crimes,
our incest ever on our minds.

We dance like moths about a flame
which never must be lit again.
It stops at this, we know it must
a casual glance, a gentle touch.

John F. McCullagh
Without the wind, without the rain
The stone of Earth would stone remain.
Did not the breath of Boreas blow
to form the canyons here below?
If not for Kymopoleia and her waves
Would there be underwater caves?
Imperceptibly, drop by drop,
The tears of heaven can conquer rock.
Turn stone to sediment by degree
And make its way back to the sea.
So too, my tears will work their art
Upon thy adamantine heart
And, in their final victory,
carry back your love to me.

John F. McCullagh
Fore Closure

I stand before the wrack of it;
The home where I first learned to read.
The humble house of all our hopes.
Our refuge in our hour of need.

Surrounded by a plywood fence,
she lies in splinters on the ground.
The debris field of my yesterdays
is spread about me all around.

I find a piece of painted wood
with our house numbers nailed upon.
I rescue it for Closure's sake
One last look, then I am gone.

John F. McCullagh
Forget Me Not

He stared at the words on the paper—
at least a dozen times.
At last he gave a little laugh and said.
"I can’t recall if these are mine.
I recognize a familiar style; a well-worn rhyming scheme.
Perhaps I may have written this back when still a teen."
Beneath his façade of outward calm, I thought that I espied
a too familiar horror in his bespectacled eyes.
I saw the fear of loss of self, of dignity, of mind.
A brilliant wit now silenced, aware of its decline.
His mind was like a drowning man who panics in the brine;
eluding would be rescuers, going down for the third time.
He handed back the paper and I was too kind to say
that this was the piece of verse he finished yesterday.
Forget me not, It seemed to say. Please don’t leave me behind,
although the better part of me has died before my time.

John F. McCullagh
Forgotten

I’m sure you never think of me-
I never cross your mind.
You’re happy with the guy you wed,
You like your life just fine.

You can’t recall that night your mom
Came storming up the stairs.
How I went out your window
And she turned back, unaware.

You joined me later on the roof
Beneath the bowl of stars-
We formed a strange conjunction
To be observed by passing cars.

I’m sure you never think of me
You took a wedding vow.
As he snores softly in your bed
You’re not thinking of me now.

John F. McCullagh
Freddy Sez

Bang the pan slowly, for Freddy is dead.  
Grasp the spoon firmly in hand.  
Aim for the Shamrock that graces the pot  
That for years Freddy used at home stands

Retire the signs so colorfully made  
That he used to urge his Yankees on.  
Sheppard is dead, Steinbrenner’s gone  
Freddy Sez follows behind.

From the time he retired till the day that he died  
He faithfully followed his team.  
He outlasted the House Ruth brought in being  
A twenty eighth win was his dream.

He wandered the stands from bleachers to field  
With the pan and his colorful signs  
Has any among us not handled the spoon?  
Will anyone bid him goodbye?

Freddy Schulman 'Freddy Sez' passed on 10/17/2010. He was a fixture at Yankee home games from 1988-2010

He left us on a travel day.

John F. McCullagh
Freeman

The taxman owned a share of him,
To another he owed rent.
His ex-wife and her attorneys
Had a say in how he spent.
When food got more expensive
He switched from Steak to bread.
The rising cost of health insurance
left him prostrate, nearly dead.
He worked all week at several jobs
In an attempt to make ends meet.
The reward for all his efforts
was to be taxed like the Elite.
He was star in his own tragedy;
a tortured leading man.
Today he is a Free man.
He died at his own hand.

John F. McCullagh
Friends Should Know Their Limits

I think snow and I could become better friends
if Snow would confine itself to where the grass ends.
Snow should linger on ski slopes, packed powder preferred.
On my driveway and walks snow should not be observed.
For this white gift from heaven is not very nice.
Snow is cold and it's wet and it soon turns to ice.
Snow snarls my commute and makes parking a mess.
My back hates when I shovel, but I fear I digress.
Snow is beautiful, falling, driven by the wind,
but a pain in the balls when the clean up begins.
Oh, I could wax poetic of snow's pristine beauty,
but my wife has assigned me to shoveling duty.
The lottery Genie could do me a big favor,
if my numbers all hit, she could well prove my savior.
On my beach, I'd recline, with a drink in my hand
and sing of 'White Christmas' with my own back up band.

John F. McCullagh
Don’t you find it rather odd
that Ben Bernanke acts like God?
When banksters come in need of cash
Ex Nihilo he creates a $ta$h.

No mere bald bureaucrat is he!
His is a Divine decree.
With bold keystrokes, Almighty Ben
takes from me to give to them.

There are examples from the past
when Noble twits debased the cash.
They mixed base metals with the Gold-
But Ben makes dollars you can fold.

Not backed by silver nor by Gold
That’s “Faith” and “Credit” that you hold.
It cramps his style to ask for metal
When Ben goes and floors the pedal..

By Keystrokes and the printing press
Ben claims he can forgive our debts.
“If China will no longer loan-
“To hell with them, I’ll print my own.”

John F. McCullagh
Galatea

Pygmalion beseeched Aphrodite: goddess, please answer my plea:  
"Give life to my dear Galatea,  
that she may live always with me. "

The goddess, in a generous mood,  
animated your figure Divine.  
Your breasts, generous in proportion,  
Your bubble butt one of a kind.

Your skin is a fine alabaster;  
Like marble, but warm to the touch.  
Could your sculptor have done any better?  
No, I'm sure there is only one such.

With golden, shoulder length tresses 
and lips, apple red, candy sweet.  
It's not much of a mystery, really,  
That Pygmalion was swept off his feet.

John F. McCullagh
Garbo Speaks

I’d worked late each night that summer,
I had some free cash in Eighty Nine.
So, it was only natural
when I needed to unwind.
I’d grab a meal and have a glass
(or two) till final call
Then show up in the morning for
my stint at Broad and Wall.

The Blue bar at the Algonquin
was always my first choice.
Steve Ross was singing in the oak room,
I recall his lovely voice.
The bartender and the waiters
knew my wants without a word.
As I waited for my supper
a distinctive voice was heard.

Even in her eighties, Garbo struck a
regal tone.
Despite cancer's indignities
She would have honored any throne.

She knew I’d recognized her,
though I never said her name.
I’d been just a child when she
had her last brush with fame.

She knew me from the brokerage house
Her account was with my boss.
We’d sometimes spoken on the phone
about a gain or loss.

I asked if she would like a drink
when next the barkeep came.
She eyed the Bourbon in my glass
and said “I’ll have the same.”

We were two people, both alone,  
She famous, me, obscure.  
For me it was her solitude  
that acted as a lure.

I knew she’d never married  
though there were lovers and affairs.  
It was as if the single life  
was answer to her prayers.

“You know I never really said:  
‘I want to be alone.’  
It’s just I knew I had the strength  
to be out on my own.”

She knew I had just lost my Dad,  
The pain was very keen.  
She said “I lost my Father back  
when I was seventeen.”.

“I appreciate your kindness...  
It’s going to take some time.”  
“If you know where your heart lies, ”  
She said, ” You’re going to be fine.”

I paid the bill and we stepped out  
into a warm and humid night.  
I hailed a cab for her  
and then we said our last good Night.

I never saw her face again  
or beheld those striking eyes.  
It was just a few months later  
We got word that Garbo died.

John F. McCullagh
Gary Speed

Glory came early as did fame.
to Gary Speed there on the pitch.
Cheers he heard from adoring crowds
among the elite he found his niche.
With time’s passage he lost a step
even if he felt the same
but as he ran he thought he saw
an old man’s shadow
in a young man’s game.

He coached to stay around the game.
After the cheers for him had faded
A friendly face, a familiar name
but as he coached he thought he saw
an old man’s shadow
in a young man’s game.

For many, Gary was an icon,
a living legend of the game.
They failed to see the mortal man
with silence weighting on his frame
As he tied the rope he thought he saw
an old man’s shadow
in a young man’s game

John F. McCullagh
George Steinbrenner, The Boss

He bought the Yankees for a song
From CBS and Michael Burke:
He worked restoring Yankee Pride
It was his life's great work.

The House that Ruth built long ago
Was then in disrepair
Where aging veterans stumbled through
tong seasons of despair.

With Crafty Gabe Paul at his side
He made some dandy trades-
Deals that worked out better
Than the one Mike Kekich made.

The boss was quite the artist
And his medium was rare.
Free agents flocked to sign here
Sacrificing facial hair.

With Munson as his Captain
And Jackson as his straw
He won a pair of trophies
And the Yanks became a draw.

For hiring and firing
The Boss has known few equals
As soon as Billy would depart
The Boss would plan a sequel.

But Munson took up flying
One day he died in flames.
Remember Murcer’s Eulogy
At church and in the game? □

Boss castigated “Mr. May”
When Rings were hard to find-
George fell for Howie Spira’s spiel
And was banished for a time.
Just then his Yanks in doldrums lay
As the Mets in Queens would rise.
Gene Michael Drafted wisely
And he held on to his guys.

A core of good young players rose,
His Yanks on top again
Mr. Torre won four trophies
With Mo Rivera in the Pen.

George built a brand new Stadium
On River Avenue
And his team went to the Series
Cause that's what the Yankees do.

And on the Night Godzilla roared
The Yankees won it all
It's dedicated to the Boss,
For now and ever more.

John F. McCullagh
Gettysbugh Address

Two folded sheets of paper
were hidden in his stovepipe hat.
He mouthed the phrases with his lips
on the platform where they sat.

The air was cool and tolerable
on that remembered day.
The stench of death hung in the air
from heroes Blue and Gray.

A Doctor of Divinity intoned a simple prayer.
A local band then played.
Doctor Everett spoke two hours
In his solemn practiced way.

Only then did Lincoln rise.
His face seemed aged and somber.
I was then a child of five
standing fifteen feet yonder.

There upon the Field of battle
amidst the legion of the dead.
He did honor to their sacrifice
And the sacred cause he led.

He spoke about equality
He promised a rebirth.
Government of the people
would not perish from the earth.

That is all that I remember.
of the consecration day.
I was then a child of five,
Now I am old and Grey.

John F. McCullagh
Ghenghis Khan

Genghis Khan was a ladies man
on constant call for booty.
He’d conquer towns, and then sleep around
like it was his sacred duty.

He swept the steppes of maiden heads
on his own star search for beauty.
He tapped the ass of many a lass
from Princess to common cutie.

From his nomad home to just North of Rome
So widely spread was his chromosome
That this years Khan Reunion
Is scheduled for the Super dome

John F. McCullagh
Give Me To The Wind

The Judge decreed that I must die
for my 'crime' of self-defense.
I've spent five years in prison since
abused in every sense.
When I have done my final dance
And the hangman cuts me down.
Please donate my organs.,
Don't consign them to the ground.
Let one blind see with my eyes.
Let my young heart beat free.
Give others a new lease on life
Don't say the gift is me.
Better than to become dust
as you wear black and mourn.
Death is not the end of Life
So do not be forlorn.
Don't consign me to the ground
That would be a waste and sin.
Consume with fire what is left
and give me to the wind

John F. McCullagh
Glenridge Hall

In Sandy Springs stands a mansion, but not for very long. The trees, grown great, will share its fate, soon all will be gone. "its progress! " say the town fathers; a new subdivision tract. To preservationists it's a tragedy; mark the calendar in black. A massive Tudor mansion, an edifice so grand-
At fifteen thousand square feet it could house a massive clan. Too soon the wood will splinter and the stone and stucco part. The walls will be imploded as the demolition starts. The wrecking ball will smash stained glass that Tiffany supplied. You will almost hear the timbers shriek as the vandals work inside. The stately home of Thomas Glenn was once Atlanta’s pride. It was finished in the tragic year of Nineteen twenty nine. He passed away soon after, the family moved away. Now empty, its’ clocks all stopped, it waits its’ judgement day. We men of mortal flesh all know how quick we pass away. Our achievements soon forgotten, our honors made of clay. We build great homes to house our kin; this hall was built to last. Yet “progress“ is inexorable and this; a relic from the past.

John F. McCullagh
Gold Medal Blues

Please hide the newspapers-and turn off the news.

Please, nobody talk. I’ve got the gold medal blues.

No radio talk show can cure what I got.

Why couldn’t Sid hit the post with that shot?

America’s team gave it their best

We beat those Canadians on the first test.

We out skated the Swiss, steamrollered the Finns-
yet only got Silver for all of our wins.

Though we were the home squad it all seemed so wrong

The crowd in attendance was booing our song.

They dressed all in red, waved the maple leaf flag

One fan looked like Celine Dionne in drag.

Luongo, their goalie, was playing at home

While he made basic stops he did not look that strong.

The American goalie did more to impress
With grace under pressure- no hint of distress

J.P. Parise’s boy gave us some hope

with time running out it was tied like a rope.

But sudden death hockey well deserves its name

Crosby’s second chance shot quickly ended the game

Please hide the newspapers-and turn off the news.

Please, nobody talk. I’ve got the gold medal blues.

No radio talk show can cure what I got.

Why couldn’t Sid hit the post with that shot?

John F. McCullagh
Golgotha At Auschwitz

Golgotha at Auschwitz

Perhaps they had tried to escape,
or else done some petty crime.
These three would not be gassed or shot-
The rope would serve just fine.

Two men, one boy with nooses fixed-
condemned but never tried.
The nooses tightened on their necks
as they kicked the air and died.

Except the boy, he was too light
He lingered when they died
“Where is God? ” one man muttered
“Where is He? ” others cried.

They made us all march past the place
Where those three in judgment fell
The boy in his slow agony
still endured his private Hell.

The path we walked was ash and bone
Of former inmates made
Those gassed and buried in the air
These were their sole remains.

“Where is God? Where is He now? ”
Some muttered as they passed.
I thought- if He’s not hanging here
More than likely He’s been gassed.

(based on an entry in a Auschwitz survivor’s memoir)

John F. McCullagh
Good Night Harry

Hands joined around the table on the roof of the hotel.
Ten years ago this night he passed on to where spirits dwell.
A single candle, burning bright, illuminates our band.
Will Houdini deign to appear to any mortal man?
There is a whisper on the wind, how ill the taper burns.
Is it Harry come back from the dead to tell us what he's learned?
Bess Houdini called his name and kissed his photograph.
Alas the chains of death are strong and hold her hero fast.
She, at length, blows the candle out and bids us to disband.
She said "Ten years is long enough to wait for any man!"

John F. McCullagh
Grassy Knoll

I am older now
than you were then.
That day still lives
in memory

Did you hear the rifle's
echoing sound
as you passed me
in your Limousine?

The next,
like a Zapruder film,
plays out
in my unsettled dreams.

I saw a spray of pink
and blood.
I heard shouts
and a woman
scream.

Panic filled
my childish heart
I saw fear in
my Father's face.

I am older now
than you were then
that day
the world changed.

John F. McCullagh
Gravity

I would be a lot less heavy
if you would just lighten up!
Running up a flight of stairs
With you in tow, that's tough.

You are the fore-sworn enemy
of a woman's perky breasts.
Nor are you any friend of knees
Or lower backs, I guess.

It's true you do some useful things:
You keep the moon in tow.
You've set escape velocity
To keep me here below

All who would rise resist you,
All who yield must fall.
You're the bete–noir of existence
For Humpty Dumpty on his wall..

John F. McCullagh
Gus, The Bi-Polar Bear

Torn away from his two loving parents,
And put on display in a zoo, .
Gus suffered from chronic depression
A white bear with black moods, sad but true.
He'd swim figure eight's by the hour,
as if stuck in a Mobius strip.
Zoo officials called it a neurosis
But were worried their bear just might flip.
A consultant said Gus had depression
And collect a munificent fee.
Gus would be treated with Prosaic
And be as happy a bear as can be.

John F. McCullagh
Guy On The Horns Of A Dilemma

I greet you in the morning
with a flute of dry Champagne.
I thought we drank it all last night-
My headache thinks the same.

You looks at me with sparkling eyes
And purr at my caresses
I know that You could be the one
But I don’t know what your name is.

I know it’s not Delores
That was Seinfeld’s girl du jour
I think I can rule our Angel
from your words and deeds impure.

For the moment I can temporize
With sweetheart, murmured low
But endearments are no substitute
Her name I need to know.

You tackle me and cuddle
With lascivious intent
If this will be the daily grind
I’m up for sharing rent.

You say “I’ have got to shower”
Or else I’ll be late for work.”
“I’ve forgotten what your name is,
You must think I’m such a jerk”

We laugh at the coincidence
And each give a name and number
We make a date for later
And both know its' not for slumber..

John F. McCullagh
Half-Life: A Prophecy

They died; they all died, without a moan;
their final passage writ in stone.
Dark shadows here and there you see
where Jews passed to eternity.
In these silent streets no children play
No trees survived the heat that day.
A suicide martyr some call a hero
was detonated at ground zero.
Nine hundred thousand are believed lost
in this second, instant, holocaust.
The suitcase he held in his hand
was the latest weapon from Iran.
My team has come here to retrieve
the evidence from Tel Aviv.
No one will be living here
Not for another fifty years.

* * * * *

A damsel with a dosimeter,
in a vision I once saw,
warned me that appeasement
nearly always leads to war.

John F. McCullagh
Hamlet Meets His Maker

Unseen and scene,
Of both composed;
these aery heavens,
this solid globe.
Will roused my Sire's
ghost from the grave.
Will would, for
that's the part
he played.
What is Will's will
I next should say?
Will I best Laertes
with my foil today?
Will the villain, Claudius,
be undone
by his victim's
vacillating son?
What is Will's will
regarding Mum?

Unseen and scene,
Of both composed;
these Aery heavens
this solid globe.

Now I lay dying,
and Fortenbras comes.
Let my tale be told
in every tongue.
'The rest is silence' -
Thy will be done.

John F. McCullagh
Happy Feet.

When he was found, more dead than alive,
on the Shore of a Kiwi Beach,
the Emperor Penguin was brought to the zoo
and they called him 'Happy Feet'
He'd drifted, they say, for days and days-
over eighteen Hundred miles.
The poor little fellow nearly wasted away-
when they found him he was half starved.
Day by day, they nursed him back,
The folks at the Wellington zoo.
Now the time has come to return him home
Its the Kiwi thing to do.
So he'll take a sail with a freighter bound
for his cold Antartic home.
When he gets there, he'll pull up a chair
and take a vow never more to roam.

John F. McCullagh
Pressure intense
around my head
and shoulders.
I am pushed
thrust
towards a distant
glimmering light.
My perfect
world
collapsing.
I am pulled
unwilling
into a world of bright
and cold.
Pummeled
by a white coated
assassin.
Made to weep
forced to breathe.
They lay me down
on your warm belly.
Your voice says
softly
'Hello, little guy'
I think
(but do not say)
Happy Mother's Day!

John F. McCullagh
Harvest Home

The corn is crowned with flowers as harvest's end draw near.
Men and Women, Lads and maids all raise a rousing cheer.
Pile high the wagon with the fruits of Ceres Golden Horn.
The fortune of the fields is ours for now is Harvest Home.

John F. McCullagh
He Lived

He Lived
So long she was disconsolate,
her only son was gone.
Years had passed and still she mourned,
while everyone else moved on.
Pictures in an album
brought pain as she recalled,
still, gradually she took solace
from the fact he’d lived at all.
We all bear psychic scars
from those we’ve loved, then lost.
It’s the burden of existence
and we all must pay the cost.
She hopes, upon an astral plan,
to meet him face to face.
A place where sorrow turns to joy
and all tears are erased.

John F. McCullagh
He Sang Those Songs Without Words

When they brought him to the Hospital
He was listed as John Doe.
He would have liked the irony-
as Harry Chapin fans well know..

His hair was like a lion’s mane
His face both kind and strong
Though doctor’s tried and nurses cried
Harry had sung his last song.

Like Wednesdays’ child with far to go,
He’d been on the road that day.
He was scheduled for a concert
For which he’d take no pay.

He sang songs for the suppers
of the poor and the deprived.
He may not have been “Religious”
-but he lived life sanctified-

His car was observed slowing down
And weaving between lanes
He might even have been dying then
of Coronary pains.

The trucker behind him could not stop
He rode the brakes in vain.
The truck smashed into Harry’s car
which promptly burst in flames.

The Trucker and a Motorist
dragged Harry from the flames.
I’d dearly love to thank them both
But I don’t know their names.
They Med-evacuated him
A helicopter came.
They brought Him to Nassau County Med-
listing “John Doe” as his name.
On that torrid summer day,
Without a breath of air,
There would not be an encore
That much, at least, was clear.

Left incomplete were several songs
whose words he never got to write.
Music that he never shared,
All lost within the dying of the light.

Harry’s eyes were glazing over,
It was certain he had passed.
I hope he had a peaceful end
when his Corey came for him at last.

(A tribute to Harry Foster Chapin: Singer, Songwriter and Philanthropist.
12/07/42-07/16/81)

John F. McCullagh
Heart Like A Stone

I have bad dreams.

They come, unbidden, into my room at night.

They pass through the maze of my alcoholic daze;

They take me back,

Back to a dusty desert road;

Our convoy is headed towards Mosul.

But we never make it there:

The Humvee is upended by an eardrum shattering blast.

I am falling.

I see you are screaming but there is no sound..

Blackness.

I died three times on the medivac copter

But the Corpsman kept bringing me back.

I have bad dreams

In them I see the faces of the dead,

They are the faces of my friends;

My friends, for whom I mourn

Until this heart becomes a stone.

John F. McCullagh
Heart’s Desire

For years it was the seat of Love;
an all-consuming fire.
Eros was his guiding light
to which his thoughts aspired.
His words have touched so many hearts,
a master of his art.
But now his heart is silent
but not his Heart’s desire.
For, surely, one who loved so well
lives on an astral plane.
I cast my verses and my pen
With Shakespeare in the grave
And pray the Lord his soul to keep
While we his music save.

John F. McCullagh
Hearts Touched By Fire

Half obscured by powder smoke, the long Grey line comes on.
“Double canister and hard shot, pour it on them boys! “
They dress the line and still they come, inexorably, like fate.
We are in need of some support, but will it come too late?
A high wood fence disrupts their charge, like clotting blood they mass.
As many a dying Virginian boy wishes for his cup to pass.
“For Fredericksburg! “ “For Fredericksburg! “ Alonzo Cushing cried.
We worked our guns and gave them hell for all our friends who’d died.
Our blood is up and still they come, over the parapet.
We are all determined this is as far as they will get.
A breath of air, a cooling drink, a lover’s soft embrace;
Strange things crowd into your mind when in a hellish place.
A company of New Yorkers, coming on the double quick,
Have piled into the Rebel mass where the fighting was most thick.
Back you go, proud Virginians, back over the low stone wall.
Not so many as started out, no longer proud and tall.
A rebel of some prominence sits, dying, near my gun.
He asks for General Hancock, strange to hear that name upon his tongue.
My friend, Alonzo Cushing, lies beside the caisson where
He bleeds profusely from his wounds. He is too far gone to care.
He will not live to see the Sun rise in the East again,
Or live to hear a nation’s thanks for what he did for them.

John F. McCullagh
The problem with “Heaven on Earth”  
As those who've survived it can tell  
Is that the purveyors of Heaven  
Wind up like the ruler of hell.

Remember the Bolshevist State  
That was going to “Wither Away”?  
Once secret police displaced orthodox priests  
It didn't quite work out that way.

Consider our “Golden State” neighbors  
they take pride in “leading the way”.  
I'm too old to “go West” so I'll send my “regrets”  
As they sink under debts they can't pay.

There are those who would rouse us to envy  
And tell us the “rich” have to pay  
But postpone your bliss; they'll define you as “rich”  
As they tax all your money away.

Heaven's a great “destination”  
But best enjoyed after you die  
Then cavort with the heavenly Houri  
Share a drink with old friends in the sky.

The problem with “heaven on earth”  
As I can attest with a sigh  
Is that our Houri charge by the hour-  
And my bar tab's incredibly high.

John F. McCullagh
In her time she's seen them all:
Johnson's anguish and Nixon's fall
From Camelot's dissolution
In a grieving nation's tears
Helen Thomas was a witness
to the history of my years.

She held a place of honor
Where all to her deferred:
Senior writer in the press corps
Well respected, sometimes feared.
Now she's fired and disgraced-
banned from her accustomed place.

The arbiters of elegance
took umbrage at her words
Her statement lacked “correctness”
As per the beltway herd
She's a racist and a bigot, An old and senile shrew-
They have no need of sticks and stones who know what words can do.

Once upon a better time
We had a Bill of Rights
The press was free and speech was free
We were vigilant of our rights.
But now it's just a paper
a tapir burning in the night..

These days the press conveys the lies
that government wants heard.
If any dare to disagree
They're soon kicked to the curb.
The rest will heel at master's voice
Like obedient whipped curs.

Her speech may have been hateful
Doubtless many will agree
But speech must be protected
Or else none of us is free.
Where's our Voltaire with courage rare
to defy rank tyranny?

John F. McCullagh
A weak and vacillating man, 
one vain and narcissistic, 
one once drew a line upon the sand 
with consequences cataclysmic.

Now some will say 
the line’s been crossed, 
while others say not yet. 
Intervening in a civil war 
won’t end without regret.

Relentlessly his minions beat 
the drums and call for war. 
Propagandists lionize 
Their would be king once more.

In Austria, Franz Ferdinand 
is stirring in his crypt. 
Entangling alliances- 
It seems I’ve read this script.

Now if the lights go out again 
as they have dimmed before 
We will not see them lit again 
If we blunder into war.

John F. McCullagh
Henry, Man Of Sorrows

"My crown is hollow without a son. My kingdom cannot brook delay. My Lady Anne would be my wife, but never will my mistress be. The papal legate will not rule to let me put my Queen away. Wolsey wants to be a Prince but Rome is very far away. I can't depend upon the Cardinal to accomplish what I pray. I need a quick and legal way to disavow my Spanish Queen, Then wed and bed my Lady Anne and sire sons of lordly mien. I am convinced by Holy Writ that marriage to Catherine was a sin. My gentleman of the Privy chamber; Please show Thomas Cromwell in."
Her Beautiful Day

Since she was young she had dreamed of the day
When she would be dressed in white lace
With a bouquet of roses held in her gloved hands
and the sheerest of veils on her face.

You know how time flies
In this work a day world
In business she was a success.
The men in her life seemed mere boys, nothing serious, -
Then she noticed a lump on her breast.

A dread diagnosis, a virulent Cancer,
This surgeon said terminal C.
She had little time left for romantic love
She thought that her dream could not be.

Her friend, a photographer, encouraged her then
to put on her loveliest dress.
She posed for her close-ups
In a flower decked chapel
And they say even Death was impressed.

Every young woman possesses a beauty
No matter their complexion or size.
In this difficult life they are angels among us;
Truth and Beauty reside in their eyes.

John F. McCullagh
Her Breasts

The young girl disguised her nervousness, sucking in her breath. The cool air made the nipples stand upon her naked breasts. I rubbed my hands to warm them. I gently felt the nodes. Slightly tender but not swollen were those perfect milky globes. A subcutaneous cyst was all her breast exam revealed. I smiled and told her she could dress. I saw she was relieved Those breasts which lately caused concern once more a source of pride. I made notations on her chart. 'Your Mom's waiting outside.'

John F. McCullagh
Her Last Game

We all come to our final play,
our last Touchdown, our last score.
When we reach the realization
We can't do it anymore.
For most, our age will dictate
when we leave the field or floor,
but to one athlete dying young
one last game means much more.
Lauren Hill loves basketball.
She was a High School Star.
Her cancer is inoperable.
She stumbles now and falls.
She knows how little time' she's left,
before the last leaves fall
On Sunday next she'll take the court
to feel the Love once more

She'll hear Our Anthem one last time
Ten Thousand throats will roar.
Lauren Hill, for all of us,
will make her final score.

John F. McCullagh
Here Come The Brides

She may wear a Tux or
she may wear a dress.
They may write their own vows
for the love they confess.

The Catering halls are
expecting a boom.
(As do divorce lawyers,
those profits of doom.)

The law may help spur
new household formation
while Religious folk cringe
and cry: 'abomination'.

The bakers are unveiling
their latest confections
for brides and their mates
with the strapon erections.

The Political types were
apprised of the facts
on joint tax returns
they'll gather more tax.

The city clerk will be busy,
quite busy indeed;
wedding Lilith to Eve
and Adam to Steve

John F. McCullagh
Hey, Cinderella

I got the part!

I’m feeling fine!

No more for me

the Chorus line.

The hardest part

Was that audition

Wait for call backs-

That’s tradition.

I got the part!

No more must I

Dance with some

foot stomping guy.

I’ll play step mother

With such malice

I’ll wow the Prince.

I’ll play the Palace.
I got the part!

I’m feeling fine!

Now Daddy help me

Learn my lines.

John F. McCullagh
Hey, It Could Be Verse

I write poetry for a living
And it's hard in this recession:
-Getting by on one thin rhyme.
-Its a recipe for depression.

If beauty would inspire me
I'd go hang out in a bar
Where, I've heard it said, by 3 A.M.
Plain Janes are movie stars.

I stand out in the Quatrain
To catch couplets in my hands-
But they slip between my fingers
And get soaked up by the sand.

Some poets hear the music
in the speech of common man.
I'm tone deaf to the Siren's call
-like a whale beached on the strand.

I haven't quit my day job
And folks say thats for the best
It may not be that glamorous
But it keeps me fed and dressed.

I'm a writer in the blogosphere
It's a living I suppose-
It's a harsh and spare existence
when I'm reduced to writing prose..

John F. McCullagh
Here was age and here was beauty,  
The nearly young and very old- 
women standing, stripped stark naked 
there were forty in all told.  
That cold early morn  
In Sobior, the SS planned to test 
Their newest means of murder 
On these Jewesses undressed.  
First robed of everything they’d owned, 
Then compelled to disrobe- 
Forced into the chamber 
Where monoxide soon took hold. 
First the banging on the door 
That was securely locked 
Screams and imprecations 
Then silence borne of shock. 
Ten minutes it was over 
The last of them had passed 
An open pit would be their grave 
Their fortunes had been cast..  

The path that led up from the camp 
To where they breathed their last, 
We Germans called the “Himmelstrasse” 
For even villains need a laugh. 
But on this day in Forty three 
The sheep did more than mutter 
They killed a dozen guards then fled. 
They would not yield like the others.  

John F. McCullagh
His Gemma

Sixty Seven years they were together,  
until only death did part.  
It is difficult for Him to deal with:  
Death rends asunder human hearts.  
Until this happened his mind seemed clear  
in spite of his advancing years.  
Then his daughter got the call  
That nearly broke her grieving heart  
Her Father asking for her mother’s number-  
He’s lost Gemma’s number and needs to talk.  
He needs to hear her voice again.  
To tell her at hat his love is true.  
Through tears his daughter answers back;  
“ I ‘d give you the number if I knew.”

John F. McCullagh
His New Blue Suit

He was, at home, most comfortable
in collared shirt and jeans.
Just not the sort to put on airs
Or fancy dress, it seems.
In his later years, especially,
It seemed style had passed him by.
So his new blue suit gave me a start
With the new Red power tie.
The haberdasher had done him proud,
But he wasn’t that sort of man-
Still, given the occasion
I knew he’d understand.
I asked a moment at the end
Just before the lid was closed
To memorize the face I loved
Lying there in his new clothes.

John F. McCullagh
Hobbesian Girl

Some think it cute when young girls twerk,
Or use cosmetics like Tammy Faye.
Isn't it cute to hear them curse?
Childhood? - Oh, that's so passé.
Dress them like their older sisters;
in clothing barely more than slips.
Put hooker heels upon their feet
to roll those prepubescent hips.
I pity those who think this progress.
I put the ball back in their court.
The taking of innocence, I find appalling.
It makes childhood nasty brutish and short.

John F. McCullagh
A Man who served in Vietnam
is coming home today.
He’d scarcely recognize us-
so long he’s been away.

He fought in the Tet offensive
in a city known as Hue.
Somehow, unaccountably,
when others left, he stayed.

An honor Guard escorts him,
descending from the Plane.
He is an easy burden;
a few bones, a soldiers’ name.

For years he waited patiently
for the searchers to arrive.
The dead are far more patient
than their brothers who survive.

With the help of Mother’s DNA,
to test a shard of bone, .
the private was identified,
and finally made it home.

Three volleys, fired in the air,
resound as Taps is played.
His brother, who accepts the flag,
with time has gone quite gray.

We make a promise to our men;
You’ll not be left behind.
The search goes on across the globe
another son to find.

John F. McCullagh
Homecoming

Grandfather built, with his own hands
The house we children called our home.
A fine expanse of stone and brick,
a castle that was ours alone.

That was before the threatening storm
turned us into refugees
The howling wind, the battering surge
Let loose the Ocean's enmity.

Of our fine home scant trace remains:
Some stone and the foundation walls
Keepsakes and memories long displayed
Sadly we have lost them all.

No loss of life, no death to weep
But still a sense of loss pervades.
The certainty of Youth is gone
And fallen trees can give no shade.

We'll build again with our own hands
The house our children will call home.
I think, perhaps, on higher ground,
Where Ocean waves do seldom roam

There we will make new memories
Those things we lost will matter not.
We have each other, that is enough.
We'll build our heaven on this spot.

John F. McCullagh
Hope Is A Slender Reed

She was a young girl, just fifteen,  
when the wondrous deed was done.  
Behold, a virgin had conceived;  
It was foretold she'd have a son.

She was promised to an older man,  
a joiner of wood, simple and plain.  
Many a man might have demurred;  
exposing her to the stones of shame.

In his troubled sleep, he had a dream,  
revealing all that God had done;  
Joseph took Mary to be his wife  
As the Roman census had begun.

Mary considered these things in her heart  
As the infant grew and thrived.  
He was strong in wisdom, kind of heart.  
Though Herod pursued Him, the child survived.

Three years he traveled these ancient hills;  
In synagogues and Temples, he taught.  
Until, betrayed, he was arrested,  
and brought before the Roman court.

How hard for Mary to behold  
her only son upon a cross.  
She heard Him cry out to the sky  
and yield His spirit when all seemed lost.

It seemed he was in Satan's power;  
When even gold appeared but dross.  
Then Joseph of Arimathea came  
to claim His body from the cross.

Hope is a slender reed;  
足够 to build a dream upon.  
She, too, beheld the empty tomb.  
The stone removed, the Master gone.
John F. McCullagh
How I Met Your Mother

I was waiting on the platform,
waiting for a westbound train.

I was thinking about you
but I didn’t know your name.

I had seen you at the wedding-
You were playing bass guitar.

I didn’t at the time yet know
How wonderful you are.

Amazingly the train was late,
delayed because of rain.

You came with that umbrella.

I forgot about my plane.

I somehow found my courage
to finally ask your name.

In time we would share sorrow
But first we’d share romance.

I’ve no regrets that we two loved-
just grateful for the chance.

Someday I’ll tell our children
How we met there in the rain
How a shared umbrella
brought us close
While waiting for a train.

John F. McCullagh
How I Won The Lottery

I've played it out of habit, bought the tickets, stood in line.
I've called the game "the stupid tax" at least a hundred times.
I've dealt with all the nay-sayers who tell me I can't win.
They'll all be here with their hands out the day my ship comes in.

For on that day Champagne will flow and I'll be of good cheer.
Bankers and accountants will all vie to have my ear.
All the long stemmed lovelies who ignored me heretofore
Will be slipping me their numbers and hoping they can score.

That day I'll dress in bespoke suits and watch the Wall Street ticker.
They'll call me "top shelf Johnnie" for my discerning taste in liquor.

Even with my new found wealth, I hope some things will linger.
I'm still with my first wife you see; I've never been a swinger.
Through these years of losing tickets she always stood by me.
That day that she said yes was when I won my lottery

John F. McCullagh
Hwang Yang

His mother goes there every day.  
His dried blood stains still mark the spot. 
She gets down on her knees and prays.  
Such grief will never be forgot.

Her son was murdered for his phone.  
A single bullet to the head. 
A single gold shell case was found 
not far from when he was found dead.

He was his mother's only son  
coming home from work at night. 
Police came and took his Dad-  
for victims must be identified.

Such suffering must one's heart bear  
remembering that final day  
to see him silent on a slab.  
over and over it replays.

So numerous are Urban youth  
like drops of water in a stream. 
Still each dropp is a human life.  
Every droplet bears a dream.

His mother goes there every day.  
A gentle rain begins to fall.  
His girl left some carnations there.  
She struggles to accept it all.

John F. McCullagh
I Am The Ball

Vile stubby fingers invading all my holes,
You take my body in your chubby hands.
You swing me in an arc along your side
And violently heave me in the air.
I crash down on a track of polished wood
And dizzily set off for parts unknown.
I smash into a bunch of wooden pins-
The seven and the ten I leave alone.
A spinning wheel prevents me from escape
And launches me back again to where you wait.
Though you will try your best I’d have to bet
The split I left is not one you can make.

John F. McCullagh
I Have A Scheme

“Too long, this land has walked in darkness
Her steps dogged by doubt and despair.”
“Today I come with my solution:
Say the Pledge and say a prayer.”
A great turnout, three hundred Thousand
Overflowed the grassy Mall
Up on Lincoln’s Memorial Steps
Glen and Sarah were enthralled.
There, where Martin had made History,
They evoked a brighter day.
An America with pride and courage-
Where, before tests, school kids could pray.
Restore the country, restore our honor
Turn the country back to God
Sarah Palin invoked King
(which seemed at least a trifle odd.)
Something beyond imagination
Taking place before our eyes:
People showing love of country,
Not spreading hate, nor spewing lies.
Forty Seven years before
Martin Luther King had stood
Upon these steps and told a dream
which, in time, all understood.

John F. McCullagh
I Lost That Loving Feeling (Song Parody)

You never Lift the seat any more
When you have to pee
And when we're making love
You always finish before me
it's getting hard not to notice, Hubby
That weekly you get more and more chubby

I've lost that loving feeling
while staring up at the ceiling
I've lost that loving feeling
Now it's gone, gone, gone
Whoa-oh

Now there's no tenderness
In your eyes when you reach for me
You seem more interested
In our wall mount LCD
I'm depressed and inside I'm dying
Cause Baby can't look beautiful crying

I've lost that loving feeling
while staring up at the ceiling
I've lost that loving feeling
Dead and gone gone gone
And I can't go on
No-oh-oh

Don't expect me to get down on my knees for you
You'd have to pay me more than you expected to!
We've had it love, but now I'm gonna have my say
My day in court, the Judge will make you pay.

Bring back that loving feeling
with someone far more appealing
Bring back that loving feeling
Now it's gone...gone...gone...
And I can't go on...
No-oh-oh...
John F. McCullagh
I Loved A Man

I’m not ashamed,
Nor should I weep.
Sometimes, into dreams,
Old memories creep.
Photographs will fade with time
sooner than these dreams of mine.
Yes, you taught me how to love
And yes, it was a precious gift.
I am the child of your old age.
Now, of your presence, I’m bereft.
I kneel here by your stone today
And think of all that I have lost.
To pause a moment, reflect and pray
And wish you happy Father’s Day.

John F. McCullagh
I Wonder What You’re Doing Tonight

Orion, mighty hunter,
is casting down his light.
He is my lone companion
On this frosty winter’s night.

Not long ago, not far away
He shone upon us two.
Back when we were still in love,
Before you said we’re through.

I wonder what you’re doing tonight.—
Tucking in the children, turning out the light?
Do you toss and turn the same way
I do every night?
I wonder what you’re doing tonight.

It’s possible we’re laughing,
both, at the same comedy.
It will have a happy ending—
unlike the tale of you and me.

It could be that we’re wishing,
both, on the self-same star.
Those wishes cannot be the same
For wishes seldom are.

I wish you were remembering me
but you wish to forget.
Both wishes go unheeded
in a lifetime of regret.

I wonder what you’re doing tonight?
Tucking in the children, turning out the light?
Do you toss and turn the same way
I do every night?
I wonder what you’re doing tonight.
I Wore A Gold Star

I wore a gold Star.
I bear a tattoo.
When Six Million died
I was one of the few,
Through the mercy of God
or the missed chance of Fate,
I escaped from the boxcar
into winter’s dim light.

My parents and sister,
Long are dust on the wind.
Their faith and their race
were their only known sins
Now, though stooped and arthritic,
I still testify
To the bitter cup tasted
when the Six Million died.

(

John F. McCullagh
They’re a militant group of foodies of whom we live in constant dread. 
They’re not ones to be satisfied with bribes of jam and bread. 
They’re like a pack of locusts, descending on Food Mart. 
Soon not a Twinkies left alive, just wrappers in the park. 
They started out as teenagers staring at an open fridge. 
The concept of “leftovers” they view as a sacrilege. 
They’ll eat you out of house and home and leave you not a crumb. 
You thought your cookie stash was safe, but now you’re feeling numb. 
How did we let it get this far? Should the government intervene? 
Hear their cry “Aloha Snack-bar” It makes me want to scream

John F. McCullagh
I’ll Call It A Day When I Die

I’m the boss, I don’t plan to retire..
As long as there’s breathe in these lungs
I’ll sing till my body’s past tired.
For music’s a sweet occupation.
and mine is a lyrical line.
For singing has been my true love
And music my only vocation
A concert puts a song in my heart
and the work is like I'm on vacation.

John F. McCullagh
If She Were My Daughter

I’m a real estate man
In a suburban wasteland
And I’ve opened many doors in my time.
A lifetime of regrets,
But I cannot forget
What she said to me over the line.

“ If I was your daughter, and getting divorced”
What would you tell me to do?
“With two children at home
Abandoned, alone”
Do I sell out or stay? ”
“What to do? ”

Her husband had left her
Pregnant, adrift.
with their five year old son at her side.
Post partum, alone
She’s on the phone
What should I tell her to do.?

The house had a mortgage
Perhaps “under water”
But the debt service-
that she could do.
She had a good job
And in spite of that slob
She was one girl who could see it through.

“ If I was your daughter, and getting divorced”
What would you tell me to do?
“With two children at home
Abandoned, alone”
Do I sell out or stay? ”
“What to do? ”

I told her to stay, there was no other way
After taxes, its cheaper than rent
She would have some hard times
And be house poor besides-
But the schools here are better for them.

Back in the depression,
When things were the worst,
Couples fought hard to stay true..
But it seems nowadays
Nearly one in two strays
And everything’s falling apart.

..

John F. McCullagh
I'll see you later.' My Father said as they wheeled him off on the gurney. 'Good Luck, Pops.' my heart in my throat, as he went on his last journey. He left us in that hot July, when the heat waves' course had run. I wandered in shock and disbelief thru a world without a Sun. For a long time after Pops had passed I struggled with depression. Life went on for others; at least that was my impression. Yet even in my darkest night I had my memories. Sometimes, in the deepest sleep, Pops would return to me. In his deep rich Irish Brogue he'd speak from beyond the vale. My Memories of unconditional Love can never fade or pale. To have been loved as we two loved; there is but one Love greater. As I woke and rejoined the work-day world I whispered 'I'll see You Later.'

John F. McCullagh
Immaculate Mary

She reigns above the grimy thoroughfare
where Gun Hill Meets Jerome.
A school house made of yellow brick
serves as her earthly home

It was built by Italian immigrants
with plaster Brick and stone.
It comforted the Irish Micks
when they felt all alone.

A sculptor found the beauty
contained in a block of stone
and carved an inspiration
for her people far from home.

The faces at her table change
They hail from different climes
The words and accents differ
in the liturgy of time.

Our lady stands as guardian
where the human meets Divine
Her school, a testament to faith,
in difficult turbulent times

John F. McCullagh
Some writers strive, through poetry, to gain immortal fame. Still Shakespeare lacks our company And trees have died in vain.

Disney put himself on ice Ted left his head behind But Cryogenics leaves me cold- Not what I had in mind.

A computer genius friend of mine Said he could turn the trick- Immortalizing me on line with just a few mouse clicks.

By the grace of cloud computing He’d record what makes me tick Thus I’d remain accessible when I’m no longer quick.

Then for a modest monthly fee Folks could my wit- To any hard drive that has free About 2 kilo-bits

(Walt Disney was cryogenically frozen. Ted Williams head has been frozen)

John F. McCullagh
In A Dark Wood Wandering

The moans and screams of dying men;
a scene and sound surreal.
The flower of French Chivalry
cut down by English steel.
English Harry has won this day
on this wet and muddy ground.
So many high born men laid low,
but I am still around.
It was my blood that ransomed me
when others’ blood was shed.
I am the Duke of Orleans.
A poet, some have said.
In the aftermath of battle;
wounded, left to bleed.
Sir Richard Waller found me
and attended to my needs.
So today I am his prisoner,
we’ll become friends in time.
Now I am bound for England
as a “guest” of the English crown.
We’d had the numbers and the strength
to bring proud Henry down.
His Yeoman archers turned the tide
on this awful muddy ground.
Beset by woods on either flank
No room to strike or move.
It was our Constables’ worst mistake
and the last, as time would prove
Like a dark and deadly rain they fell
out of a clear blue sky.
Here on the field of Agincourt
where Princes came to die.

John F. McCullagh
In A Nutshell

Living on a minor planet near a very average star,
There arose a type of primate, the most inquisitive by far.
Not the strongest or the fastest of the animals on earth,
but blessed with an intelligence that quickly proved its worth.
Long before they had the means to travel very far,
They raised their eyes in wonder at the glory of the stars.
thus embarking on a quest that has yet to reach its end.
as they parse the light of distant stars in their thirst to comprehend.

John F. McCullagh
In Another's Garden

The sun was just about to set
when I happened on the scene:
A small and well kept garden
scented with Magnolia trees.
Someone had placed a wooden bench
beside a whispering pond.
I never knew this gem was here
In New York, most green is gone.
There were seasonals and perennials
competing for my senses.
A most welcome distraction
from my dark and somber penses.
So little time remained before
the light would fade away
and their beauty and their brilliance
would be shadowed, dark, and grey.

I thought about my childhood home
and the fruit trees that once grew there.
of the flowers and the vegetables
cultivated with my parents' care.

Concrete now covers every inch
of my remembered home.
They put a housing project
where, upon a time, I roamed.
I felt a sudden pang of loss,
fought back a foolish tear.
Here, in another's garden,
I had travelled back the years.

John F. McCullagh
In His Corner

The Cut man and the manager had seen this scene before.
Smoking Joe was staggering.
He looked destined for the floor.
His left eye badly swollen from where a cut had bled.

For Fourteen Rounds
He'd matched his foe, the greatest, many said.
Now it seemed he's have to yield to this implacable foe.
Eddie reached and grabbed the towel he was prepared to throw.
Frazier glared with his good eye to tell his corner 'NO'!

The minutes seemed forever.
He gave his all, they said
The fifteenth round has ended and smoking Joe is dead.

In their last fight in Manila in 1975, Frazier and Ali traded punches with a fervor that seemed unimaginable among heavyweights. Frazier gave almost as good as he got for 14 rounds, then had to be held back by trainer Eddie Futch as he tried to go out for the final round, unable to see.

This is my tribute to Joe Frazier. In my scenario he goes out for that fifteen round against his opponent, Death

John F. McCullagh
In Living Memory (11-22-63)

Do you recall where you were that day, that November Friday afternoon? The moment that you heard the news that someone had murdered J.F.K? Some were just children at the time who now have grown so old and grey. Half those Americans are gone who heard what Cronkite had to say. That day that Camelot came to grief, and power passed to L.B.J. Yes, I am a child of then, that day lives still in memory.

John F. McCullagh
In Tents

In Waltham, on a Soccer field
A city of pink tents was pitched.
A neighborhood with real thin walls
Some chat, some snore, some mainly itched.

In the distance, thunder rumbled.
Streaks of lightening split the sky
Soon, I knew, the rain would come here.
We must find shelter, you and I.

I am not the outdoors type-
Five star hotels are more my speed,
But out here on the soccer field
Tent building skills are what I need

I 'liberate' a sheet of tarp
To serve as floor for our domain
And with your help I pitched the tent
while laughing in the pouring rain.
Once inside the nylon bubble
(My shoes and clothes quite soaked with rain)

A tiny leak, a Chinese torture

Drop by dropp upon my brain..

Back out again into the Tempest
Back out across the sodden field
I’m seeking out a piece of plastic
to keep out the piss warm rain.

I return to our tent in triumph

A sheet of propylene I found

Is just the thing to keep the rain out

I plop down on the slick wet ground..

The woman in the tent beside us
Like a lusting Walrus snores,

But twenty miles this day behind us

I soon won’t care if Lions roar.

John F. McCullagh
In The Company Of Heroes

In the Company of Heroes

The 506th is aging
Passing into history
Dick Winters now has fallen in
with Easy Company.

He did not like to speak of war,
once He was safely home.
-Excepting at reunions
Or, infrequently, by phone.

Still the story needs be told
to the generations next:
How they parachuted into France,
How they fought Hitler’s best.

How many left their youth behind
In hedgerows or in fields,
Or in the snow around Bastogne
which they refused to Yield.

He was the biggest brother.
He commanded Easy well.
He had the gift of leading men-
They would follow him to Hell..

He never wanted medals
Or acclaim for what he’d done.
In the company of heroes,
He never boasted he was one.

Some are old and crippled,
some forever young.
In that company of heroes
Each man did what must be done.

Somewhere Easy Company
is gathered all around.
As they place Dick Winters in the ground
Let a mournful trumpet sound.

John F. McCullagh
In The Country Of His Heart

In the shadow of Ben Bulben
off the road from Mullaghmore
in the parish yard of Drumcliffe
you will find me there for sure.
It is a fair spot where I lie
Here in my native loam.
This was my heart's desire
This was my mother's family home.
How beautiful is Sligo
that I nevermore will see.
I've now become a part of that
which was a part of me.

John F. McCullagh
In The Dark Of The Sun

Having heard so much about nightlife,
The Sun was at pains to discover
The mysteries of the nighttime
So she pursued it around like a lover.

But wherever the Sun would go,
She would find the night had just been.
The Sun sighed with frustration
Night had eluded her once again.

"I’m not very good as a Stalker
even though I’m such an early riser.
I’ll never discover my dark side
And I’ll end my days no whit the wiser"

Author’s note: I’m just being whimsical here, so don't get all Copernican on me.
I know the Earth Revolves around the Sun and rotates on its axis.

John F. McCullagh
In The Garden Of Remembrance

A simple curved stone bench
Set in a rustic niche.
Outside, this city bustles,
here, time passes by the inch.
There’s a fine array of roses
and stone tablets on the wall.
The inscription is in Irish,
It tells of a rise and fall.
As I sit, quiet, here
Near the bronze children of Lir
The reflecting pool brims full
of my races’ gathered tears.

John F. McCullagh
He was not from these parts; a big city teen.
At Five - Six not imposing, he was barely fourteen.
A big city teen with a bit of a mouth,
which was bad for a black man in the heart of the South.

A warm summer day in an old country store,
The white girl was a looker; that much was sure.
Emmitt Till whistled for he was impressed
With how good that girl looked in that tight fitting dress.

That girl had a husband, a big burly man.
He was a bad man to cross for he rode with the clan.
He and his cousin sought out Emmitt Till.
If a man can die slowly they both swore this one will.

The two held Emmitt captive in an old wooden barn.
They strung him up with barbed wire and broke both of his arms.
They gouged out one eye for the pleasure of pain
Then they dragged out to the river his mortal remains.

His poor mother wept when she saw what they'd done;
How they'd tortured and murdered her beloved son.
She mourned, open casket, and word soon got out
How Black men were killed in the Heart of the South.

The law found Till's killers and brought them to court.
But the jury was friendly (or else they were bought) .
The two killers went free, smiling, down the court steps.
But their sins lit a fire folks here won't forget.

After Till's death Civil Rights was the cause
There were marches and protests; the movement changed laws
The Klan's hold would be broken; of that do not doubt,
And, slowly, things changed in the heart of the South.

John F. McCullagh
In The Moment

In the empty stands
Our champion sat.
Sans fans
and sans applause.
He mulled over
The match just past;
Its aces
and its flaws.

To have come so close
And not prevail-
A lesser man might cry.
But Murray knew the glory
That comes when Mortals vie.
He thought:
'I'm getting closer,
Than I ever have before'
A silver cup
At Centre court
Was the vision
That he saw.

John F. McCullagh
In The National Gallery

Here, in the pale light of a winter’s day
I entered with a sketch pad in my hand.
I never dreamed that I’d encounter you-
To sketch out some old master was my plan.

Was it your eyes that first seduced me near,
or those cherry lips that I would never taste?
Two centuries past you were a beauty, dear.
Now, all but this image, time has lain to waste.

I envy him who painted you in camera,
together in your sitting room alone.
Who knows just how the session was concluded
If your old and senile husband wasn’t home?

I’m cast here in the role of a voyeur,
I haven’t even tried to draw a line.
Your dress of silk reveals just one bare shoulder,
Your eyes, the promise of a night divine.

John F. McCullagh
In The Ready Room (06-05-1942)

So sad, to see these empty chairs, where, just the day before,
Our brave young aviators sat looking like the gods of war.
They won a famous victory, our wing commander said,
But when a flyer dies in combat we never see them dead.

The planes they flew were obsolete; they never had a chance
The Zero is more maneuverable, so deadly and so fast.
Let no man doubt their courage as they pressed on their attack
in the sure and certain knowledge that they weren't coming back.

We render one last service as we pack up our friend's gear;
the pitiful remainders of their lives of twenty years.
Their absence? a reminder of the costs of victory.
Our friends? - forever on patrol, somewhere out at sea.

John F. McCullagh
In the shadow
I live in the shadow
the shadow of the mountain
Vesuvius.

the days are warm
The soil is fertile
I grow olives and I grow rich.

Long ago the mountain rumbled
spewing lava, pumice stone
Pliny told us of the horror
Pompeians dying in their homes.

the days are warm
The soil is fertile
I grow olives and I grow old..

Life in good in greater Naples
We live in an expensive home
every now and then a rumble
vulcan working at his forge

John F. McCullagh
In Thebottom Of The Ninth

"Number Two, Derek Jeter, Number two." said the disembodied voice.
A man on second, one man out, It was Showalter's choice.
He could walk Derek Jeter, choosing to pitch to McCann.
The choice would be unpopular, not that he gave a damn.
With no one warming in the pen, Buck chose to roll the dice.
Derek had two R.B.I., another would be nice.
Antoun danced off second base, Meek delivered fast and low.
Jeter punched it to right field, where else would it go?
Antoun raced around third base and dove headfirst for home.
The crowd roared at the signal "Safe" and they were not alone.
The Captain leapt up in the air, the moment we'll remember,
our pleasure in an otherwise forgettable September.
He will not take the field again; his time at Short is done.
A handful of at bats remain before his race has run.
Bob Sheppard will go silent now, that voice beyond the grave,
The night that Robertson got the win, and Jeter got the save.

John F. McCullagh
In Vino Verities

Think of it as a thirst for Truth
That can’t be quenched by dry Vermouth.
Those souls who in the bottle find
a sauce of solace for troubled minds.

Because I can conceive of wine,
Somewhere there grows a fruitful vine.
Existence made certain by concept possible-
an essential premise Ontological.

From the grapes sweet nectar flows
To please the palate and charm the nose.
Its mysteries bring blurred speech and vision
At bottle’s bottom they find religion...

Some seek their Truth on distant peaks
From Fakirs dressed in linen sheets.
Some in bare ruined choirs dwell
With thoughts of Heaven spiced with Hell.

Still others have declared wine evil
An attitude I find Medieval
Their wine grapes meet a sadder fate
reduced to raisins on a plate.

From Vine to press, from field to glass
A boon companion to Life’s repast.
Red or White, no cause for Schism
A sommelier hears your catechism.

John F. McCullagh
Independence Day

“It’s a great life if you don’t weaken. “My aunt Helen did confide. She is somewhere north of eighty-four and never someone’s bride. Her beau died in Korea, died to keep our country free, “At least that was the pious pap they tried to sell to me.” So she lived a solitary life, watching horses round the rail. She would hang around casinos too, the reason she’s so pale. “There are no pockets in those things.” She told me at a wake. “so you won’t catch me sitting home, that’s a big mistake.” In these later years she might enjoy a second glass of wine. She is fiercely independent; she is a good friend of mine. So, if now and then thoughts scatter and she tells a tale again. I smile and listen patiently. We all get there in the end.

John F. McCullagh
Iowa 2095

The farmer stooped and took a scoop of soil into his hands. It was dry and lifeless, less like topsoil than like sand. On the far horizon a darkling cloud of dust was seen. Another year without a crop, the times were worse than lean. Human beings are full of pride, the sin that caused our fall, sure that, as populations grew, that we could feed them all. The forests shrank, the deserts grew, and erosion claimed the soil. Then the crops began to fail all across the world. Hunger stalks this once rich land, so many lives erased So many children dead and gone the shovels can't keep pace. Is this the end once prophesied, the apocalypse indeed. Once the seed corn's been consumed, hope is a slender reed.

John F. McCullagh
Ipocalypse Now!

We're headed for Ipocalypse! 
June eighth will soon be here. 
IP addresses running out. 
What will we do? Oh dear! 
Four Billion addresses weren't enough 
for every thing that beeps: 
Desktops, laptops, mobile phones 
and GPS in Jeeps.

Fear not! June eighth will be the test 
of a higher protocol 
and if the system doesn't crash 
they'll be numbers for you all.

But if IP V six 
should crash and burn 
You should not be dismayed 
The internet won't disappear 
but slowly will degrade.

John F. McCullagh
Irish Hill

Bury me at Irish Hill
a shroud of linen on my face
do not embalm my mortal flesh.
or box me in expensive wood

Find me a place beneath a tree
once I am senseless like a stone
return me to my mother's breast
return me to my quondam home

From dust to dust the preacher says
It's right and just what he intones
return me to my rightful place
beneath the rich and fertile loam

And when the sun shall shine again
I will make a flower grow
A flower with a fragrance rare
its petals joined in silent prayer.

John F. McCullagh
It

It might have been beautiful, and certainly smart
Born with your academics and my poet's heart.
It might have been witty, pithy and wise;
possessing your nose and my two emerald eyes.

It might have been evil; it may have proved kind;
the first of our brood was the last of our line.
Not that we ever will know, I suppose.
Just idle questions geneticists might pose

It would have been born with ten fingers and toes
If left, unimpeded, for nine months to grow.
We were both too young, both too unprepared,
This life, unintended, was not to be spared.

Forty winters have passed since that fateful decision.
It was swept from our path with a clinic's precision.
Now you, too, are gone, and that leaves only me
To mourn for our child not permitted to be.

John F. McCullagh
It Can't Happen Here (Revised)

Sara and Stephen were of a marked race,
living at the wrong time, and in the wrong place.
When Hitler took power, they eased each other's fears.
"Germany is civilized, It can't happen here."

When the Chancellor railed against gypsies and Jews
"He's just playing politics;" was their commonsense view.
Yet hatred took root; the brown shirts had free run
And the voters had cause to rue what they had done.

Hitler came for their guns and they meekly complied.
Few then thought to resist the strong on rushing tide.
"The Police will protect us, Sara, my dear."
"This is Beethoven's birthplace; it can't happen here."

Those were very hard times, the worst we ever saw.
Rich Jews were resented for the furs that they wore.
"They cost us the war, they are traitors, it's clear."
"Sara, don't worry, it can't happen here."

The foes of this Chancellor disappeared in the night
And he started to speak of a thousand year Reich.
He censored the newspapers; both Left and Right.
And glass littered the streets one November night.

With Hindenburg dead, who was there left to stand?
Who had will to resist that warped little man?
Pervs wore Triangles, Juden wore stars
Both lost their rights under Germany's laws.

Sara and Stephen were loaded, like freight,
on a train bound for Dachau by command of the State.
"I'm sure we'll be freed, Sara, my dear."
"We're a civilized race, this can't happen here."

Stephen worked as a slave but at least stayed alive.
He was freed by the Russians in May, Forty five.
Sara, his wife, had a far crueler fate;
She was sent to the showers by the Nazi's mandate.
Back in Berlin, Stephen saw with his own eyes that the "Thousand year Reich" was a tissue of lies First pillaged by brown shirts, then bombed in the war Stephen thought; This isn't home anymore.

Now Stephen is old, living here in the States. He looks with dismay at these two candidates. It seems like a nightmare he lived through before. A crisis is coming and there will be war.

John F. McCullagh
It Is What It Is

“It is what it is”

-Such a popular phrase!

And folks spread it around

Like Fast Food Mayonnaise.

It’s been used to describe

Economic foment,

The state of the arts and

The high cost of rent.

A phrase often spoken

When you wish to seem wise-

In the loop, in the know,

But it’s all just a guise.

It’s a symptom of sorts

Of our current malaise

You did not hear it much

in our halcyon days.

In that past, half remembered,

where house prices rose.
Where portfolios doubled,
and we all wore new clothes.
We were kings of the world
And we partied till three.
Now we live on fixed income
And we struggle to pee.

“It is what it is”
Is no optimist’s line
It’s a dull sounding phrase
Half resigned to hard times.
It implies things are bad
and inclined to get worse.

“It is what it is”
To me it’s a curse.

John F. McCullagh
It's Not Me, It's You

Mary was on time, as usual.
As per usual, John was late.
“He’d be late for his own funeral! ”
Mary fumed and cursed her fate.
They’d first hooked up in freshman year
at a frat house mixer bar
John got sick from too much beer
and hurled in Mary’s car.
They were pursuing the same major
and they lived in the same dorm.
He was always in her classes,
and they both worked at the Mall.
It was natural that they bonded.
It’s said opposites attract.
His folks were alcoholics
from the wrong side of the tracks.
Mary came from Celtic stock
Hence her saintly name
She always called upon the Lord
when, infrequently, she came.
They both loved the Smashing Pumpkins
and were devoted to the band.
But it’s not enough to make her want
to wear John’s wedding band.
When at last John made his appearance
her well rehearsed words went askew.
She said, when giving back his ring;
“It’s not me, it’s you.”

John F. McCullagh
It's The Bottom Of The Ninth

Father Time stood undefeated.
Bonds came close, but Barry Cheated.
Roger Clemens had a career for the ages
but oft fell prey to roid based rages.
Mariano Rivera was a more worthy foe
No pharmacological freak was Mo.
He threw one pitch, his control was fine,
and was smart enough to leave on Time.
I stood up and joined the cheers
the day Rivera last appeared
and, though I wept to see him go,
Time would never lay him low.
Mo Struck out Time, he had it cooking
A called third strike that left Time looking
like Beltran on another night
good morning, good Evening and Good NIGHT!

John F. McCullagh
J. Wellington Wimpy: Icon Of Our Age

Wimpy, Popeye’s sometime pal,
is the icon of our age.
No, he isn’t handsome
nor especially that brave.
He set the pattern for our lives
as we grew old and gray.
We’ll gladly pay you Tuesday
for a hamburger today.
Our deficits grew larger
than they ever had before.
We lusted after gizmos
produced upon a foreign shore
And should they ever ask out loud
how we would ever pay-
We’d said we’ll pay you Tuesday
for this I Pad bought today.
Who knew, as jobs departed,
what the future held in store?
We borrowed our homes value,
then we borrowed yet some more.
Our homes were filled with gadgets
our phones had custom rings.
Then, when things got a little tight,
We sold our jewels and things.
Wimpy, we’ve a problem
we’ve run out of ways to pay.-
We’ve eaten all the burgers
and Tuesday is today

John F. McCullagh
Jacques The Last

Our Slave ship floundered on the rocks
in the teeth of a mighty storm.
We were cast out on a nameless Isle.
Half our cargo drowned.

Morning came and the seas becalmed
And we salvaged what we could.
The Captain was a broken man
The first mate did what he should.

We fashioned shelters of rock and mud.
And found a water source.
We had no doubts, then, we'd be saved
from this Isle off the African Coast.

The Isle was plentiful with game
And we had guns and swords.
The slaves would serve our wants and needs
So we were in accord

We rigged a lifeboat with a sail
And the first mate and three more
Cast their fortunes on the winds
for Madagascar's shores.

They promised us that they'd return,
Their word they swore they'd keep.
But either the World ignored their pleas
or they sleep in the deep.

We learned, in time, acceptance,
of our lonely likely fate.
We taught the slaves to speak our French.
took their women as our mates.

Decimation was inevitable
Even in that tropic clime.
Many just lost hope and died.
Others lost their mind.
My best friend lost his life at sea
on a flimsy makeshift raft.
Of all the French who landed here
I, Jacques, am the last.

I hope my journal will be found
when I too, am dead and gone.
Please rescue what remains of me
And bear my body home.

Or else commit me to the sea
with prayers and honor due.
My woman and my child yet live
May God preserve those two.

John F. McCullagh
Juliet And Romeo

In fair Verona where Will set the scene
Belle Fortune moves the markers up and down.
Two households both alike in dignity
Fiercely compete for fear of losing ground.

When Juliet saw Romeo at the dance
Events were set in motion that, perchance,
Would see fair Juliet as our Romeo’s bride
but ultimately result in her suicide.

With Tybalt and Mercutio both dead,
And Capulet and Montague estranged.
Young Paris sought fair Juliet to wed
not knowing of her loss of maiden-head.

Romeo was banished for his crime,
a sin for which a peasant would be dead..
Their two households, joined because they wed,
remained, if anything, more deeply divided.

Summer’s fierce heat shimmered in the air,
oppressive in the absence of a breeze.
With Friar Lawrence’s help, Romeo’s girl played dead,
as if struck down by some unknown disease

Romeo, in Mantua, heard that his Juliet
Lay dead amongst the sleeping Capulets.
A draught of deadly poison he obtained
So they might sleep together once again.

When Romeo met Paris at her tomb,
Words led to swordplay, leaving Paris dead.
Would not the world have been a better place
if Romeo had kept it sheathed instead?

Unshriven, Romeo drank the poison down-
the only son of Montague now dead.
Perchance just then fair Juliet revives
Bereaved, she took his Dirk to bed instead.

Authorities, arriving at the scene, could only mourn a brace of kinsmen lost. Capulet and Montague were reconciled. Their amity bought at a fearful cost.

John F. McCullagh
July 17 1996

The weather is perfect for flying today;
seventy degrees, hardly a cloud in the sky.
I stowed my carry-on in the overhead bin.
I am glad our 747 is only half full,
perhaps I will be able to sleep on the plane.
I am due in Rome tomorrow.
There is a growing problem in our parishes and schools.
Men of the cloth engaged in unspeakable acts.
The Curia must be alerted.
The diocese has turned a blind eye to these problem priests
Moving them from parish to parish
Ignoring the harm they perpetrate against the innocents.
I will not be silent.
I watch a young family take their seats in the row across from mine.
I hope the baby is not going to cry all the way across the Ocean.
The smiling Blonde stewardess begins our preflight safety check:
"Welcome to Trans World Airlines Flight 800 to Rome via Paris;"

John F. McCullagh
Just Before The Harvest

That day stands sharp in focus
Whenever it's called to mind;
A peaceful Sunday Morning,
just before the Harvest time.

They held a picnic benefit
Each year on public land
For the Widows and the Orphans
Of the firefighters clan.

All gladly paid to enter
and bought chance books besides.
The old men brought their families
The young men brought their brides.

Bouncing on the rides and slides
erected for them here-
The children had the best of times
as their mothers hovered near.

The men were cooking barbecue,
Tossing footballs, drinking beers
You'd recognize their names-
because you hear them once a year.

The day was nearly cloudless
Seldom was the sky so blue.
Who knew so many would be lost
before that week was through.

Within two days too many here
were cut down in their prime.
Betrayed by poor equipment-
They could not escape in time.

But I, permitted to grow old,
remain to testify
about the courage of my friends-. so that their memory never dies.
That day is sharp in focus
Whenever it's called to mind;
A peaceful Sunday Morning,
just before the Harvest time.

My Brother-in-law is an active member of the F.D.N.Y. and on Sunday, September 9, 2001, we joined with his family to attend a picnic held on Staten Island. It was a charity event designed to raise funds for the Widows and Orphans of Firefighters who had answered the last alarm.

I am often asked if I lost friends in the World Trade Center. My answer is that we all did.

John F. McCullagh
Just Some Stupid Girl

Just some stupid girl,
just fourteen years old.
She should have stayed silent.
She shouldn't act bold.

Just some stupid girl
lacking all sense of dread.
Classes for girls?
She should have been dead.

Just some stupid girl
only infidels note.
She took a shot to the head,
next a knife to the throat.

Just some stupid girl
that we failed to kill
filled with stupid ideas
that are not Allah's will.

Just some stupid girl
that some have called brave
just for daring to think
she won't wind up a slave.

John F. McCullagh
Kevin Barry, Patriot

Beneath a grey, forbidding sky,
as all the Saints looked on,
Kevin Barry climbed the scaffold,
by the order of the Crown.
He would not betray his fellows
to the agents of the State.
By Courts martial, they condemned him
to a common villains fate.
This morn at Mount joy jail
as the World looked on, aghast,
the hangman’s rope snapped Kevin’s neck
and Barry breathed his last.
Denied a soldier’s bullet,
Kevin hung upon a tree,
Just eighteen, but a martyr
for the cause of Liberty.
Let him never be forgotten;
As long as we have voice to sing.
He is past all trial and suffering
at the hands of Earthly Kings.

John F. McCullagh
Keystone State Of Mind- Song Parody

Parody of New York State of mind

Some folks though we’d get away
Take a Holiday from the neighborhood
Hop a Flight out to Disneyland
Play the series in the Angel’s hood

But I’m stuck here in traffic
Out on Route I- 95

I’m in a Keystone state of mind

We’ve seen all those Dodgers
Leave in their 25 separate Limousines
Froze our ass in the Rockies
Beating a better team

Now you know who we’re facing
And I’m not going to waste your time

I’m in a Keystone State of Mind

It was so easy winning day by day
When the New York Mets limped into town
But I’m afraid things might not go our way
when the New York Yankees bat around.

I root for a Philly team that has lost more times
Than any other team playing any sport
I root for a team that’s named for a female horse.
I come from a city that snowballs
Santa Claus

I’m in a Keystone State of Mind
King Putt

The President assessed the scene and gave a terse command. 
His caddy grabbed his putter and put it in Obama’s hand. 
The breeze as not a factor 
The air was hot and still. 
The hole, a dozen feet away, blocked by a small windmill. 
Barrack needed this putt for par. to help him tie the score. 
Boehner got a hole in one in the clown face just before. 
Obama gave his ball a stroke-it veered wide, an inch or two. 
It’s a pity folks are watching Or he’d lie about that too. 
That he should be reduced to this; Playing at the “Pirate’s cove. 
The sequester is a right wing plot likely dreamed up by Karl Rove.

John F. McCullagh
Kobayashi Maru

My gleaming white constellation class Starship
(My dirty white Chrysler K car)
was out on patrol near the neutral zone
(I was driving back home from the bar)

It was then I received a distress call
(I urgently needed to pee)
Some Klingons decloaked in proximity
(I sped past a cop car or three)

I called for more speed from the engine room!
(My transmission started to shake)
Klingons pursued in the neutral zone
(They motioned to me HIT THE BRAKE!)

“What seems to be the Tribble, Officer? ”
I said to the humorless Gorn
That Klingon impounded my vehicle
(Because they caught me exceeding Warp Nine)

If Kirk faced this “no Win” situation
He’d probably get off with a fine.

John F. McCullagh
Landmines In The Living Room

Those Landmines in the Living room
Can do a man much harm
And, being metaphorical-
They’re a challenge to disarm.

When my daughter’s home from college
a month can seem an age
A simple misspeak or misstep
can incur her wrath and rage.

Her life of course is difficult
She cannot drink or drive
She sleeps all day and parties nights
It’s a wonder we’re alive.

Weight opinions carefully
Whenever she’s around
Don’t set off a screaming match
you will not win a round

We have a fortnight left until
We pack her out the door
And when she’s gone I’ll miss her-
until she invades once more.

John F. McCullagh
Landscape Painted Red

Every drop of blood slaves shed
beneath the lash and rod
was repaid in kind at Sharpsburg
by the terrible swift sword.
Twenty three thousand Sacrificed
in joint sanquinity
to debate the principle
that all men should live free.
At Burnside's bridge,
on the sunken road,
The Landscape dripping red.
The wounded called for water
as they lay among the dead.
At the Whitewashed Dunker church
the Dutchmen stood agog
as the fearful toll was paid
by brave souls on either side

John F. McCullagh
Las Mariposas (The Butterflies)

In the last year of Trujillo's reign, the Dictator decided to eliminate three sisters and then plausibly deny it. Patria, Maria and Minerva were the victims of the plot. Once the three were dead and gone, He'd make sure folks forgot. On a lonely country road, they were ambushed by his men. They forced the sisters off the road. That's how it began. The girls must not seem martyrs; Trujillo had made it plain—nothing quick and merciful, like a bullet to the brain. The men used bats to knock them down and smashed their faces in so they could not be recognized by their own next of kin. They placed the bodies in the car and pushed it off the road. "The butterflies are free!" they mocked; "Those girls reaped what they sowed."

In the Dominican Republic, the wheel, if slowly, turned. Trujillo met a bloody end and freedom was regained. The truth was slowly brought to light, the murderers were named. The Maribels were honored and their martyrdom proclaimed.

John F. McCullagh
Last Battle

When he returned from Vietnam
it was in part, not whole.
Something akin to jungle rot
had seeped into his soul.

He was not fit for steady work
or the company of man, and
in his dreams lurked demons
only liquor could withstand.

The streets of San Diego
are more hospitable as most.
You'll find him sleeping on the grass
in the Corps of the lost hopes.

His final battle rages here,
more desperate than in Nam.
this veteran fights for dignity
in a cold, uncaring land.

John F. McCullagh
He'd offered her his hand to dance
Politely, she'd declined.
"I have promised many others,
-perhaps another time."

He accepted this with all good grace-
"Perhaps another time,
When your dance card is nearly full,
The last dance shall be mine."

The night was young and she was fair,
Men clamored for their chance.
In some eyes she saw routine lust,
In others- true romance.

Her card was signed by many
There remained a single line.
She stopped back at her table
for a final cup of wine.

The dark and handsome stranger
was waiting for her there.
She took his hand without protest
as he rose up from his chair.

He led her to the dance floor
as the band played one last time.
The music was a stately waltz
done in three quarter time.

His arms were strong and masterful
as he led her in the dance
Her will seemed to desert her
as she fell into a trance.

In the half light she looked up
And searched his face and eyes
The eyes of Death looked back at her,
In lust for her demise..
Swept up in her dance with Death,
She uttered not a sound
for she was in his power now.
and destined for the ground.

John F. McCullagh
Last Night Of The American Republic

Somewhere a woman’s keening’
Crying piteously,
It’s coming from the harbor.
Her name is Liberty.

When charity is extorted
No charity will be found.
When government controls us all
We have no common ground

America is a failing state
towards communism drifting.
Several masters, many slaves
and no one in the middle.

We’re sorry Ben, we couldn’t keep
the Republic that you gave us.
With backroom steals and crony deals
The democrats enslaved us.

Somewhere a woman’s keening’
Crying piteously’
It’s coming from the harbor.
Her name is Liberty.

John F. McCullagh
Last Song - Whitney Houston, R.I.P.

A thoroughbred voice.
A stellar career.
A beautiful woman
singing songs sweet and clear.

Must I mention the millions
that flowed to her coffers.
Whitney could have enjoyed
what this world has to offer.

Then she married a punk,
not the least bit refined.
She drank a bit much
she did a few "lines";

A broken down voice;
missed notes and miss dates.
A fate like Monroe's-
Cut off young by the fates.

John F. McCullagh
Last Summer

Summers by the Jersey shore
Have always called to me,
As though a Siren lived beside
our cottage by the sea.
A place where wave
and wind and sand
conspired perfectly
to make a simulacrum
of what Paradise might be.

This will be my last summer
coming to the Jersey shore.
My medications manage pain
But they can do no more.
The doctors say I have six months
before I cease to be.
So I have chose to spend that time
in my cottage by the sea.

I walk alone at Evening tide
beside the golden shore.
The tide erases every step
I take forevermore.
For I am not eternal
Like the deep and restless sea.
In truth I am ephemeral
More than I’d like to be.

I cannot bargain with my fate
I cannot buy more time.
This vintage, strictly limited,
is dying on the vine.

Too soon it will be Labor Day
And time for you and me
To close the place up one last time
our cottage by the sea.
Last Words

The old man sat on a log near the road,
with his faithful dog right by his side.
They had been walking
on the trail through the woods
when he’d felt something different inside.
Perhaps if I rest
For a bit T’would be best.
It is a hot day after all.
He looked at the trees
In their splendor of green
But the heat made him wish for the Fall.
He thought of the Love of his life,
Mary, his wife,
And part of him let fall a tear.
For clearly he knew that this pain in his chest
Gave proof that his own end was near

They found the old man on the log near the road
His faithful pet still by his side.
Death had come quickly
And his face seemed composed
Like a poet who’s finished his lines.
They found in his hands
His poet’s notebook
And the EMT read his last words:
You’re my Eve and my Eden;
Please don’t mar with your weeping
the face that I loved most of all.
But take care of the Garden
We tended together
Until I again come to call.

John F. McCullagh
Latte Dazed Saint

I've soiled my sacred garments. I fear I've fallen far. I have a pounding headache and just woke up in a bar. My clothes reek of tobacco. My heart races from caffeine. As I was born and raised a Mormon this is not my normal scene.

I was prospecting for new converts, going door to door, when I ran into a sort of girl I'd never met before. Her hair was fire engine red, at least the drapes I'd say. Her blouse was silk and tightly stuffed in a most intriguing way.

She said that she was off to 'church', would I care to come along? She said the spirit moved her there, a place of cheer and song. I sensed a soul that I could save and so I went along.

Soon I was drrinking Jameson. I bought the house a round. It's amazing stuff, this alcohol, this new friend I have found. I was singing karaoke and was dancing on the bar. I guess I had a bit too much, oh, I have fallen far.

I woke up from my stupor- cottonmouthed, dazed and confused. I'd been overcome by demon rum, a thing I shouldn't use. There was somebody laying next to me, I feared it might be 'Red'. Imagine my profound relief that it was a man instead. He said his name was Khalid and he'd come here from afar. He, too, has a Prophet who forbids drinks from the bar. It turns out he also met the girl, this 'Red' of whom I speak. He's been trying to convert her and he's been here since last week.

John F. McCullagh
Leaving Libby

He was her only Rose,
and you might think it unkind
for Rose to have left Libby
so close to Valentine’s.
Still, Libby couldn’t hold him.
He felt that it was time,
for he knew in Libby’s cold embrace
So many men had died.
For Libby was a prison,
drafty, crowded and a hole.
A hundred Union men escaped
in a break daring and bold.
Under cover of the darkness
They broke for Union lines.
Like blacks escaping slavery
Polaris was their guide
It is the night of February 10, 1864 and Colonel Rose is leading a jailbreak of 109 Union officers from the infamous Libby Prison in Richmond Virginia. 59 escaped to Union lines. 48 men were recaptured and 2 drowned while attempting to swim across the James river

John F. McCullagh
Liar Learning

The Miss-Director was beaming with pride as he scurried up to escort me inside. 'Come along, these are perilous times, there is much ugly truth we endeavor to hide."

"We recruit each years class from young children who display a disdain for the truth.' 'We start with a class on tall stories, progressing to fibs and untruths.'

'By the time they are teens they are ready to leave little white lies behind.' 'They engage in deceit and deception. These skills help them rob people blind.'

'Our graduates cheat and suborn They misdirect and deflect with the great.' 'Politicians here are made, not born, and all learn to prevaricate.'

'When Bill Clinton was caught in that perjury I nearly went out of my mind.' 'If only he'd paid more attention in Class and less to some Coed's behind.'

We had come to a massive rotunda The Pantheon of all untruth. Holograms of Stalin and Churchill telling lies in an endless loop.

There were quotes from the Koran and Bible inscribed on the sides of the wall. A Left wing devoted to Lenin. A right wing like a Munich beer hall.

' The people must never be told that a place like this even exists.' 'You can count on me not to inform them.'
I said, barely moving my lips.

John F. McCullagh
Liberty's Torch

In New York Harbor, long ago,
The prison ships rode upon the tide.
Ten thousand Patriots crammed aboard,
Starved, abandoned, and left to die.
They sacrificed sweet life you see
So we might enjoy Liberty.

When the Philadelphia ran aground,
hard by the shores of Tripoli.
We sent Marines to fire the ship
That she not fall to piracy.

Again upon Saint Mary's Heights
at Fredericksburg, a sight to see.
Ten Thousand Union casualties:
white men dying to set blacks free.

Can you recall the names of those
who did not want to live forever?
They died in France in the Great War,
the one that would end wars forever.

From age to age, from Gen to Gen
From falling hands the torch is passed.
It is now ours to hold on high
Let not the flame of Liberty die.

Tyranny and ignorance
And the darkest superstition
Oppose the light of Liberty
and would make this Earth a prison.

We must be ever vigilant,
despite the World's derision.
For if the light of Liberty dies,
Our faults won't be forgiven.

John F. McCullagh
Life After Life

You hear people talk
about the 'Great Beyond',
but it's all speculation
as they've never gone.
Except perhaps Hindus
who chance to recall
that back in the day
they were Queen of us all.
What amazes me most
about past life regression
is none claim to have practised
the 'oldest profession'.
They claim to be Caesar
or Henry the Eighth,
Never some drab
who was just a 'good date'

John F. McCullagh
Life And Art

For the artist, Joanne Cooper, on the occasion of her eightieth birthday

With keen eye and skillful hands
You take the light of other days
And produce lush landscapes for your fans
Much like a playwright crafting plays.

You start with canvas white and clean
So like the snows we’ve lately seen
And with bold strokes make form and line-
Virtual playgrounds for the mind.

With age comes wisdom to impart
Suffused with light, these stand apart:
Common place made special art.
The gracious gift of a gentle heart.

John F. McCullagh
Lights Out

I looked up at the bowl of night
And saw Orion’s form,
But several stars were missing
And the poor hunter looked forlorn.

Alnitak was missing
Betelgeuse was all but gone
Rigel’s star was fading
and would not survive til dawn.

Look there, in Canis major,
A nearby constellation group
Sirius seemed rather dim
The Dog Star began to droop..

Was something tragic happening?
Or was I going blind?
Mother warned about that-
I disbelieved her at the time

I had to find a way to tell
The world the epic news.
These days folks aren’t looking up
Most stare down at their shoes

Like a fire’s dying embers
stars faded from my sight
The Dim stars were completely gone
the others half as bright.

The vast and empty dark of night
Enveloped me in dread.
Would the sun come up tomorrow?
Would we shortly all be dead?

I went to clean my glasses
Before sounding the alarm
It was then that I first noticed
the lenses both were gone.
They had come loose in my pocket
and would need expert repair.
I nearly caused a spectacle-
Thank the Lord I have a spare.

John F. McCullagh
Lilly

I called her tiger Lilly
As she favored clothes with stripes
But I did not back away in fear
when she flashed her pearly whites.

There’s a chapel on the campus
And we both so liked to sing
There was just one little problem
Lilly wore another’s ring.

She’d been six months separated
From her lawful wedded mate.
She’d suffered two miscarriages
love had started to abate.

It still of course was possible
That they might work it out
But I found myself falling
Every time she was about..

We started sharing moments
At the ballpark and the shore
As much as we were together
I found myself wanting more.

I told myself its over-
that her man’s not coming back.
She’s a pretty, gracious flower
and a tiger in the sack.

And then one day it ended
Her parents intervened
They forced them back together
We never had our farewell scene.

A year after we’d parted
There was a story in the news
Lilly died in a car accident
Her husband had been stewed.
So every year on that same date
The day I heard you’d died
I lay a Lilly on your grave
It’s from your other guy.

There have, of course, been lovers since
Remarkable women who
I’ve had the privilege to have loved
But none have been like you.

John F. McCullagh
Every woman has one in her closet,
Although some are loathe to confess.
It’s perfect for many occasions.
It is known as the little black dress.

For Women who seek to entice,
or have men they want to impress.,
There is nothing terribly virginal
concerning that little black dress.

Its of Spidery inspiration and,
oh, what a web they can weave.
They use it, some say, ensnaring their prey.
It comes out again when they grieve.

In Wedding, our Ladies wear white.,
A Little black dress when they keen.
They dress in subtler shades of gray
on all the days in between.

John F. McCullagh
Little Red And The Wolf

It was the role of a Lifetime, but she couldn't accept.
She passed on the chance with a twinge of regret.
It was clearly off Broadway but it would have run long.
A role some would die for, but the timing was wrong.

It had started one night with a casting couch call
from a powerful man - a slob more broad than tall.
Promises whispered, but would they be kept?
Had the mega- producer enjoyed his starlet?

The review came positive in a ladies' room stall.
Cinderella was late for more than the ball.
She who couldn't resist, and then couldn't complain,
now had a pregnancy she couldn't explain.

While she thought she might, one day have a child,
surely not with this stranger, this crude pedophile.
A girlfriend loaned her money; she went there alone,
She kept the appointment she'd made on the phone.

Her calves in the stirrups; her heart in denial,
The deed was done quickly in back alley style.
She nearly bled out; it was botched from the start
But the abortionist did manage to still one beating heart.

Just a face in the crowd; not a name many knew.
She had some bit parts then she faded from view.
These days her name is on everyone's tongue;
The wolves of Hollywood devour the young.

John F. McCullagh
Living In

In our small town of Hixton, Wisconsin,
The future looked decidedly grim.
Population was down to four hundred
And we all thought its best days had been.
We’re a small town North West of Milwaukee
where U.S Thirteen passes by.
Here the median age is past forty,
with less than one girl for each guy.
The town fathers were in a quandary;
scratching their heads and their chins.
Half the houses were vacant and boarded;
Just a trickle of tax coming in..
“Our churches are bare ruined choirs,
Our young finish school and they leave.
The town as we know it is dying,
There’s only one chance of reprieve! ”
Some thought it an outlandish suggestion.
It offended all those who believe.
“The renaming of Hixton, Wisconsin
must be done with all possible speed.”
“Desperate times demand desperate measures;
This is the last card I have up my sleeve.”

It was done as our Mayor suggested
and, as hoped for, the new blood poured in.
Our post mark is much in demand now;
Since we began living in “Sin”

John F. McCullagh
When your best friends a canary,  
you've been too long in the mines.  
The dust that marks  
your skin and lungs  
is never far behind.  
Paler than a Vampire,  
hidden from the Sun.  
Long hours digging with your pick  
wherever the seam may run.  
Sometimes the dust  
constricts your breath.  
Some times you feel undone.  
When you're living life in dog years,  
you can count on dying young.  

John F. McCullagh
Living In Hiroshima

A morning in Hiroshima

In August of the year

I walk towards a tower

with battered walls and naked steel.

The dome is open to the sky

The walls have crumbled down

All else around had been laid waste

This was the zero ground.

In that river there were bodies

burned beyond recall.

Thousands dead around here

And scarce a standing wall

An involuntary Shiva

A chill creeps down my spine

One bomb destroyed this city

A monster born of mind..
We gather to remember-

The mayor says some words

Silence, a bell ringing,

sounds a warning to this world.

If the destroyer comes again

With his thousand suns

We'll die in our Hiroshimas

with Victory for none.

John F. McCullagh
This was once a Jew’s apartment, here on the Konig Platz.
It must have been magnificent, before we were attacked.
I squat in an apartment whose glories are all past.
The artwork was seized off these walls and the former owner gassed.
Now the copper mansard roof leaks nearly every time it rains;
It’s my only source of water so I’m not one to complain.
My sleep is poor and fitful, as the foe controls the sky.
How long can we endure this siege? How many more must die?
The noise is indescribable; so many allied planes.
We cannot quench the fires; bombs have burst the water mains.
Food is hard to come by, that’s been true ever since spring,
And it’s gotten worse since Russian troops started tightening the ring.
I see old men and boys march out in their tattered Wehrmacht Grey.
They are poorly armed, with just Panzerfausts to keep the Reds at bay.
In a broken shard of mirror, I glimpse what I’ve become;
a scarecrow of a woman; full of fear, no longer young.
To the Russians that won’t matter; I still have three useful holes.
They would take their turns at raping me while I curse and damn their souls.
My husband died at Normandy and I’ve lost our only son.
Now all I need to join them is one bullet and a gun.

John F. McCullagh
Living Memory

The water laps against the hull
Just like that time before
Just like that Sunday morning
That exploded into war.
In these old eyes
That yet can see
Those waves of rising Suns,
A tear wells up
In memory
for those forever young.
Below my feet
My brothers' lie;
Proud Arizona's crew.
For a time I have
Escaped their fate
But now my days are few.
and when I die,
I'll make my grave
In Pearl, beneath the Sea.
Then all we suffered
Will be lost
to living memory.

John F. McCullagh
Lonely are the brave on this night before the slaughter.
Santa Anna's troops surround us and they promise us 'no Quarter.'
There's a mass grave up in Goliad, 90 Texans in all told.
They were our last hope for relief. That's what we were sold.
We are buying time for Austin that's what Colonel Travis said.
I hope these thirteen days suffice, for tomorrow we'll lie dead.
Colonel Bowie is with the infirm, our round shot is nearly gone.
The long guns of the Mexicans will be limbered up at dawn.
A mournful serenade is playing, just beyond the wall.
They play the music of the dead hoping to unnerve us all.
When morning comes we'll hear the cry of two thousand charging men
And when they finally breach the walls then will our struggle end.
Until then we stand ready before Texas and the world
to fight them for our Liberty beneath a lone star flag.
When the last of us has fallen all will have earned an honored grave.
For the Alamo we give our lives. So lonely are the brave.

John F. McCullagh
Love Is An Accident

Love is an accident
Waiting to happen
Despite all precautions
It catches us napping.

Sometimes it sneaks up
On innocent youth
Or blindsides some victim
Who's long in the tooth.

It lurks in our schools
But prefers crowded bars
(It’s occasionally found
in the back seat of cars.)

It often times chooses
a boy and a girl
Except in the Village
That’s a whole different world.

Love is an accident
Like you see every day
But you know how that is-
You just can’t look away.

John F. McCullagh
Love Is Love

Love is Love
so do not tarry.
If Tom loves Dick
then they should marry.
If Anne loves Becky's
lovely Tush,
No more beating about the bush!
But what of Harry's secret flame-
The love that dares not bleat its name?
Ewe'll have to wait another round
of defining deviance down.
If you think this all perversion
please don't quote
the King James' version.
Lines at random from Leviticus
can make you seem
a tad ridiculous.

John F. McCullagh
Love's Death (Pt 3, Catullus And Lesbia)

If we had never done the deed
and soiled the sheets together,
Lesbia we might have had
a love that lasts forever.
Instead, you lay back, wantonly,
inviting me to sin.
Our cries and whispers mingled
as I spent myself within.
Lust comes with an expiration date
and I was cast aside;
Some other noble Roman
now mounts my favorite ride.
Caesar too, will come and go;
Veni, Vidi, Vici.
Some label you promiscuous
your morals are thought dicey.
Yet you're not indiscriminate
in choosing your next partner;
The distinction is that you lie down
and do not stoop to conquer.

John F. McCullagh
Lucasta, I 'M Off To The Whores (Parody)

Nag me not (shrew) or begrudge my time
That from the Nunnery
Of thy Chaste breast and ice cold bed
To whom and bars I fly

True, the new waitress now I chase
And hope to “cop a feel”
And with lascivious eyes undress
She who, for cash, will yield.

Yet all my infidelities
Are easily ignored-
You go to bed at nine o’clock
And, what is worse, you snore.

John F. McCullagh
Lucille

It always starts with a Woman;
a woman with skin like sweet milk chocolate.
A woman with a voice like warm honey on a cold dark night
And brown eyes in which a man might comfortably lose his soul.

The club was cold; not much of a club really;
A drafty old barn of a building somewhere in Arkansas
A big barrel half filled with Kerosene was lit to heat the hall.
The Young black folk of the town were gathered around

Young B.B. King was playing the blues, on a guitar with no name.
That was when the fight broke out on the dance floor.
two strong men doing battle over a woman who worked at the club.
It always starts with a woman.

Punches were exchanged; in the melee someone kicked over that barrel
And fire, like a river, roared across the floor.
Everybody started to run for the only open exit.
B.B. King ran too, until he recalled he had forgotten his guitar.

She was nothing special except for the man who played her
The man who coaxed sweet sad sounds from every catgut string.
King wasn’t a rich man and that guitar was his meal ticket
So he raced back through the flames.

Just as he retrieved his guitar, the building began
Its slow sad collapse into ash and embers
He barely escaped with his life and his guitar.

Standing outside in the cold night
Looking on the ruins of what had been a good paying gig.
That was when he met Lucille;
She was the barmaid with the sweet milk chocolate skin
And a voice like warm honey on a cold dark night;
Those two men had just fought and died over
a pleasure that neither would ever possess.

That was when B.B. King christened that old beat up guitar
“Lucille”: 

www.PoemHunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive
To remind him of this night he almost died.
to remind him never to do something that stupid again.
Like I was saying, it always starts with a woman.

John F. McCullagh
Lucky Man

First so many seasons in a lifetime.
First so many innings in the game.
Years I spent toiling in Ruth’s shadow,
Batting my way to the hall of fame.

Proudly wore the mantle of the Captain
Which Ruth held just one day (to his great shame)
Stepped aside when I was struck by sickness
My life a shortened, but official, game.

And now another Yankee claims my record-
Man like me who battles for the prize.
The Angels say he plays the game the right way.
He is a worthy Captain in my eyes.

The park is new, the team is good this season
My seat is in the grandstand way up high.
Remember my farewell one distant summer.
When I alone knew how I was to die.

John F. McCullagh
Make Dinner, Not War

Back in the days of Vietnam
We said: “Make Love, not war.”
No matter how many Cong we killed
Like Doritos, they made more.
Walter Cronkite helped keep score
as the toll grew ever higher.
Foes relentless as the monsoon rains
They made Nam a quagmire.
We killed them all three times at least
Surely all of them were gone.
Then shortly after we had left
They turned up in Saigon!
Now we’re in a forever war
without a likely winner.
A pity we can claim a draw
And bring the boys home for dinner.

John F. McCullagh
Young Morrison was at the plate
The bat gripped in his hands
His Father, Tom, was in the park,
down in the left field Stands.

His Father has lung cancer
and cannot fly on planes.
So he came to Citifield
aboard an Amtrak train.

It was young Logan’s birthday
And he hoped for something great.
He got a pitch that he could square.
He hit it flush and straight.

Not high enough to clear the wall-
Still over Beltran’s head
He hustled as they tracked it down
and made third base instead.

How glad he was to get that hit.
His smile began to grow.
His dad was glad he’d lived to see
His boy called to “the show”

Later, at his birthday party
He gave his Dad a gift
It was exactly what he wanted-
the ball from his first hit.

Tom Logan has inoperable lung cancer. He traveled 29 hours to see his son,
Logan Morrison of the Marlins, play Wednesday night at Citifield. The triple
Logan Morrison hit that night was the first of his major league career.
John F. McCullagh
Making Cents

A Penny for my thoughts
doesn’t seem a princely sum.
It doesn’t buy much else
when all is said and done.
It might be that, In days gone by,
A penny bought a meal.
It was sufficient for the boatman’s fare
Across the Styx to steal
But now the humble copper
Is derided or forgot.-
When it comes to purchase power,
The penny has it not.
So if you would my thoughts peruse
there’s been a raise in rents.
You must come up with a dollar
I’m no longer taking cent$.
fear not, poems are still free.

John F. McCullagh
Man Of Sorrows

A Lover, cloaked in sorrow,
knelt beside his woman’s stone.
His Ann was only twenty two
when Heaven called her home.

Their love affair was secret
to all but her closest kin.
She had been pledged to marry
one of their long absent friends.

Those were dark days in New Salem.
Typhoid claimed her life.
Lincoln thought to end his own-
perhaps with rope or knife.

In those days friends feared for his life
So dark his mood became.
Some thought him suicidal
whom dark depression claimed.

A figure cloaked in sorrow,
deprived of a life with Ann.
Embraced his life of martyrdom
when the moment met the man.

John F. McCullagh
Many Mansions

There is a house that haunts my days, a house that infiltrates my dreams.
It is seven stories tall and was not made by human hands.
In this house are many rooms and I can't catalog them all.
Its chambers reach out to eternity and back towards the fall.
That which the mind can't comprehend yet can be known by heart;
The sum of all the stars at night would only be a start.

John F. McCullagh
Marching To Absurdistan

We were down in the province of Basra, Iraq
For reasons not precisely clear.
Our objective that day was a Shia run town;
A town named Sari Mi Dyr.
The road to the town was a minefield of sorts
It was booby-trapped with I.E.D.’s.
Still it was the constant sniping that caused
the bulk of our casualties.
The day was as hot as a woman’s scorn
when the last of her tears have dried.
I’ll remember this road to Sari Mi Dyr
On which so many good friends have died.
The day was near spent when command showed some sense;
We heard our choppers draw near.
They aborted the mission and extracted my men
From that hellhole called Sari Mi Dyr.
I’m writing my after action report,
and trying to hold back a tear;
When I think of the good men and women who died
On the road to Sari Mi Dyr.

John F. McCullagh
Mayor Bloomberg As The Nanny

Do you really need that second slice?
Don't you dare to super size!
Guzzling down large sugary drinks-
Do you really think that's wise?

Your hamburger is much too large
I'd cur it down to size
until its like those square ones
that White Castle serves sans fries.

I taught the City not to smoke,
in that I was thought wise.
Unhand that Nathans hot dog!
It will go straight to your thighs.

I guess I'm just a Puritan,
my happiness undone,
by the thought that somewhere, someone
might still be having fun.

John F. McCullagh
Me And Shakespeare

He was the bard of Avon,
I hail from Flushing, Queens.
I labor in obscurity,
His fans were Royals it seems.
In portraits he's shown with little hair
mine stood the test of time.
His spelling was atrocious
But spell check fixes mine.

His talent was not of one age
but meant for all of time.
My poetry is dated
And best performed by Mimes.
Its years since I last wrote a play,
Of Will that's also true.
But players are performing his.
Mine, they never do.
So if my output pales to his
And sadly lacks his wit
What do we have in common?
Not a single manuscript!

John F. McCullagh
Me And Viv

She was the heartbeat of desire,
while I was a dry upper crust of a writer.
She was the Flamingo, fluid with grace.
I was just a stiff member with a bank teller's face.
I lay with the lady as a matter of course
We woke up the next morning with all innocence lost.
I married Viv then and in London remained
where J. Alfred Prufrock cemented my fame.
It was between the two wars, when poets still mattered
Though the world of our birth was bruised beaten and tattered.
Viv had many needs that I couldn't fulfill
Her one infidelity rankles me still.
The silence between us grew as loud as the Bourse.
Though our pairing proved barren, we never divorced.
My footsteps were haunted by this girl with my name.
I resolved we should part. My friends thought her insane.
Maurice, her brother, signed to have her committed.
I saw her just once, a perfunctory visit.
She was young when she died, just turned Fifty Eight.
My fate would be different, I had longer to wait.
Of the man that I might have been, little remained
She made me a poet, my dry soul she claimed

John F. McCullagh
The air of September has turned crisp and clean,
with a hint of past autumns remembered,
as I take the field with the rest of the team
to battle the other contender.

Just like a knuckleball released to the plate
Our season has seemed to meander
In May we seemed sure of a World Series date-
But now the blogs call us pretenders.

The lead we enjoyed in June and July
has steadily melted away.
bad luck and the heat had led to defeats
while our foes seem to gain every day.

The faces around me are a mix old and new.
Some friends have been traded away-
or waived on the wire, which was needed, no doubt.

I just hope these new call ups can play.

But there is no room for self pity or doubt

While our chance at the playoffs remains

There are so many players whose dreams are long dead

while we still play meaningful games.

This poem may be about the 2008 New York Mets. Certainly the title was inspired by a statement made by Mets owner, Fred Wilpon. The speaker may be David Wright. It is also possible that this poem is using the baseball season as an extended metaphor.

John F. McCullagh
Meaningful Games 2

Meaningful games

The air of September has turned crisp and clean,
with a hint of past autumns remembered,
as I take the field with the rest of the team
to battle the other contender.

Just like a knuckleball released to the plate
Our season has seemed to meander
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John F. McCullagh
The Fox sisters of Rochester
lived in a haunted house.
A spirit there was stirring
That was probably not a mouse.
Spirits rapped upon the walls
and on the window panes.
The sisters Fox would rap right back
according to their claims.

The Foxes were sensations,
The Belles of Halloween
Their Séances well attended
By the credulous, 'twould seem.
Spirit fever gripped the land
With rapping on a table
(Maggie Fox was double jointed
And the whole thing was a fable.)

It's hard to sell your real estate
when it's a haunted home.
But when spooks rap, rap right back
You'll never be alone.

John F. McCullagh
Melian Dialectic

The sides are drawn and chosen,
Neutrality has been lost.
Dread war is coming upon us,
Caring not if we can bear its cost,
For the Strong will work their will,
And the weak suffer as they must.
The weapons we've forged will be used
The red on the blade is not rust.
The losers are put to the sword.
Their women and children enslaved.
Only there will they find what they sought-
The peace that awaits in the grave.
Of Justice we no longer speak.
Might, naked, commands the stage
Melos fought bravely, alone,
Not a stone of their city was saved.

A

John F. McCullagh
Memorial Day

Dappled light through sheltering leaves
on a perfect summer’s day.
My lady love lies on the grass
Alas to pray, not play,
For I am one who gave his all
And have no more to give.
O’ to be anywhere but this,
I wanted so to live.
To hold you close,
and feel your kiss.
To let you have your way.
Honor’s call was
cruel to us both
on this Memorial day

John F. McCullagh
Memories In Melody

We had quite a run old girl,
nearly all of it was fun.
A rose is my final gift to you.
I, too, am nearly done.

For sixty years we played the songs,
the stuff of memories.
Our audience has greyed or strayed,
now you've abandoned me.

Our house is like a record store-
Ten thousand old L.P's
Each song labelled and cataloged
-memories in melody.

I did our show that one last time
for those fans who still care.
The truth is I cannot go on
because you are not there.

Beside my bed, your photograph,
You're ever on my mind;
a single rose named Dorothy
whose melodies were mine.

John F. McCullagh
Merry Chri$tma$ 

It’s that time of the year 
When commercials appear 
to implore us to buy this or that.

For the shopkeepers fear 
that without Christmas cheer 
They will never get into the black!

Some Fraud in a red suit, 
Quite obese and hirsute, 
will be called on to hawk toys to tots.

Johnny Mathis and Bing, 
Ad nauseum, will sing 
old chestnuts of holidays past.

So we wish you Merry Christmas 
Now that Halloween has past. 
Here’s hoping, too, perhaps that you 
might spend as you did in the past.

Let the registers ring 
It’s a wonderful thing 
To see all the rich spend their cash.

John F. McCullagh
They were scattered, here and there.  
Some were in pieces, some intact.  
Some were strapped into the wreckage;  
Others lay upon their backs.  
These were staring, sightless, at the sky;  
That place from whence they came-  
They had been headed on vacation  
when a missile struck their plane.  
The Western World roars outrage  
and Dutch folk weep their tears.  
"Give us back our children  
that your hatred scattered here."  
"The world is filled with churlish men;  
Who stole our children’s years.  
The innocents have been slaughtered  
But no Savior yet appears."

John F. McCullagh
Michael Crichton

Michael Crichton would be dismayed to read about his pirate days.
Poor Michael, there is worse in store.
They plan to publish at least one more.
When living, Michael published much and proved to have the Midas touch.
No matter, Michael, that you’re gone
Your bibliography still goes on.

When Authors pay the boatman’s fee
Their fans crave more, quite naturally.
No Shakespeare lover could refuse
To give “Cardenio” rave reviews.
And when Jim Croce breathed no more
He “sang” on for a decade more.

But stuff that Authors didn’t publish
could prove to be unworthy rubbish.
(And some that sees the light of day
Might have been better hid away)
So if there’s work on your hard drive
You wouldn’t publish if alive
Dear Authors I do you entreat
When in extremis, press “delete”

John F. McCullagh
That night was cold,
The wind was biting.
All over Ireland
the snow was falling

"I was packing
my trousseau,
To Dublin town
I was to go."
"I heard a pebble
strike my pane.
A moment passed,
then, there, again."
"I looked out
On the snow filled lane.
That's when I saw him,
Saw my Michael.
His pale face raised
toward my light.
Like an angel
lost in contemplation."
"Michael's health was not the best.
His lungs were weak
and fluid filled."
"Soon after I had left the West,
I heard that he had fallen ill."
"He's buried now near Sligo town,
between Ben Bulben and the sea.
'May my Michael rest in peace,
I think he died for love of me.'

John F. McCullagh
Michael Jackson Is Still Dead

Michael Jackson is still dead-

He sleeps alone these days.

No longer will he fondle boys

whose families he pays.

Blanket will be flush with cash-

The other children too

Freed from Michael’s spendthrift ways

Residuals come through.

Michael Jackson is still dead

Though his songs still haunt the air

Neverland’s a condo now

No pedophiles live there.

It been a year now since he’s gone

Hard to believe but true

And here’s good news for girl interns-
Ted Kennedy’s gone too

John F. McCullagh
Milk Chocolate

On my fingers, on my tongue-
Your taste a sweet and pleasing one.
I unwrap you greedily
And nibble on you speedily.

Milk chocolate, I can't resist-
in miniatures or in a kiss.
Three musketeers are worth the fee-
all for one and one for me.

In a pudding or a bar
I enjoy you in my home or car.
In drink, you warm my winter day
once my shovels been put away.

We all owe Milton Hershey thanks
For inventing chocolate bars.
Kudos goes for M &M’s
to his competitors from MARS.

Intoxicating like fine wine,
Your antioxidants are all mine.
I sneak away with you, my treasure,
an old fat man's one guilty pleasure.

John F. McCullagh
Mind The Gap

For years she took the morning train
from Auburndale to Penn.
Now the economy had turned cold
And her long run neared its end.

You need to get there early-
Parking's at a premium.
That meant for years she'd risen
on the wrong side of 4 A.M.

For several years she'd lived
in the town house all alone--.
First separation, then divorce
once the children were full grown.

She'd poured herself into the job
with commendable devotion.
She'd brought much business to the firm
She deserved a big promotion.

The boss she had was hated.
“Barely competent” thought she
But his Uncle was Division head
-That's job security.

Now asked to go clean out her desk,
Her eyes welled up with shame.
Wouldn't it be simpler if she
jumped beneath the train

She saw the fiercely blinding lights
Of the oncoming train
She stepped and didn't mind the gap
Her decision had been made.

A rush of pain, then-nothing
No hint of light or sound
She never heard the ambulance-
The sirens crossing town
The folks who took the morning train
Would be quite late that day
Some old lady slipped and fell
And there was hell to pay.

John F. McCullagh
Miss December

She posed for Playboy magazine
In nineteen Fifty Four.
Her green eyes met the cameras glare,
And she cared not who saw.
Her freckled skin was milky white,
her hair a burnished flame.
Her breasts were real and firm and high.
Dolores was her name.
She married shortly after that
And loved the child she bore.
She had both family and career
And she cared not who saw.
They called her a few weeks ago
To pose for them again
For once one is a playmate,
A playmate they remain.
Her skin is mottled, wrinkled now.
She sports a silver mane.
They used a gentle softer light
And a shawl embraced her frame.
She posed for playboy magazine
Like she had once before
Her green eyes met the cameras glare,
And she cared not who saw.

John F. McCullagh
Mister He Will Do

Pretty girls can always get men,
But a girl won’t forever be pretty.
When your breasts, now so perky and lovely,
Heed gravity’s call it’s a pity.
For now you are playing the field,
and you and your Dates rule the City-
When the game is no longer afoot
You’ll wind up at home with your Kitty.

So while you look to find Mister Right
-And audition a series of Wrongs-
Don’t be napping when Mister He’ll do
Comes and sings you his adequate song.
He’ll not be as handsome as some,
And may not be as rich as the rest-
But he’ll always regard you as beautiful
even when you’re not quite at your best.

So while climbing the corporate ladder
And cheering your latest success
If you hear Nature’s call and you feel yourself fall

Put Mister He’ll do to the test.

John F. McCullagh
Modem Muse

She paints her lips in earthy tones. 
Her dress whispers seduction. 
Her curves give promise of earthly bliss 
while mine need liposuction.

A fleeting glimpse, all she allows, 
must serve for inspiration. 
The other ninety nine percent? 
You guessed it- perspiration.

John F. McCullagh
Modern Romance

Together, alone
Forever apart.
Dichotomies reign
Modern hearts.

Messages sent
By E-mail or phone
Together, apart
Forever alone.

One takes flight
The other stays home.
Forever apart
Together alone.

On a long winter’s evening
Each will practice their art.
Together, alone
Forever apart.

John F. McCullagh
Moirai

When He came home from work that day
He said “Enough’s enough”.
“Let others built the widgets,
I have done that long enough.”
I’ll live a life of leisure,
crafting poetry and song.
Perhaps I’ll write short stories
or play my guitar all night long.”
Such boundless optimism
didn’t take Fate into account.
Fate, the foe of youth and love,
was lurking there about.
He thought that He had years of time
to write and think and putter.
Yet Fate was of another mind,
and a malediction muttered.
A tightness in the chest He felt.
A soreness in one arm.
He was sure that it was nothing.
Soon thereafter, He was gone

John F. McCullagh
Monkey Business

The markets up, the Markets down
For weeks it just meanders.
Alas, my stocks are always down
Each time I take a gander.

GM, Lehman, Citicorp
My broker bought for me-
And you can guess the net result-
IHe bought a yacht, not me.

Those friends who don’t avoid me
Say I’ve reversed Midas’ touch.
I don’t turn things I touch to gold
I turn gold into rust.

I’d heard dart tossing Simians
Can best the S & P
So I went to the Zoo this March
to consult a Chimpanzee.

He took the chartt, he threw the dart
And picked a stock for me-
And now I’m getting margin calls
because I bought BP.

He seemed the sage of Omaha
before he ruined me.
I should have tried Orangutans
And paid their higher fee.

They wanted five bananas
My monkey worked for three.
But now I’m bust because I used
the discount Chimpanzee.

I might have dodged a massive loss
And profited besides
Had I but heeded the baboons’
Sell signaling behinds
Some earn it, some steal it,
some lust for it like muff.
Others work hard for hours
earning barely enough.

The lucky, with Trust funds,
have got it to spare.
Others anxiously hope
Grandma’s will named them heir.

Some guys on the Street
Take risks with brass balls.
Then live like royal dukes
in baronial halls.

In the evenings some Ladies
Will stroll on the street
Accepting donations
for sausage relief.

The government types
Have got it the best
They skim off the top
And distribute the rest.

These green little rectangles
With the Presidents’ faces-
They help us keep score
And keep us all in our places.

John F. McCullagh
More Fun With The T.S.A.

You say that you must check my thighs before I’ll be allowed to fly.
Unreasonable search is one thing, friend
But this random groping has to end!
Determined evil has its ways.
Contraband will still get by-
Viewing tourists in the nude
serves just to entertain you guys..
Babes in Burkas, they can fly.
We wouldn’t want to profile them.
Instead harass two aging nuns-
“Bend over, cough, and say Amen.”
Don’t touch my junk, hands off! I say.
Or act in a more subtle way.
Buy me dinner and a drink
You might get lucky, I said with a wink.
You think at least they’d warm their hands
Before each colonoscopy.
Is this part of Obama care?
Low cost Guynocology?
We’ve had our “moment” on the line
And now that I’ve been cleared to fly
before I jet off to Tibet
Won’t you join me for a cigarette?

John F. McCullagh
They were outnumbered and outgunned off the Island of Samar.
It was October twenty fifth, in nineteen forty four.
MacArthur's marines in Leyte Gulf would be without a prayer
if not for the crews of Taffy three and, of course, the fog of war.
The Japanese had the advantage; in crew, in ships and guns.
How could Taffy stop the surface fleet of the mighty rising sun?
The Samuel B Roberts made smoke and faced the foe.
Three destroyers joined that escort ship as the two fleets traded blows.
Paul Carr at the forward gun let loose a rain of shell.
The Sammy B. deked and swerved as fast as she could go.
She was closing on a cruiser, nearly in torpedo range
When the foe-man loosed a heavy round and her fantail burst into flames.
"Fire" Captain Copeland screamed and they let torpedoes fly.
He watched through his binoculars as they snaked towards that ship
And every crewman still alive cheered when they scored a hit.
The destroyers and the escort had bought two hours' time.
Yet all four attackers were in flames and destined for the brine.
The call went out "Abandon ship" to the crew of the Sammy B.
Paul Carr lay dying at his post as she sank beneath the sea.
The admiral of the Japanese was shaken by the sight
Of Two cruisers and a battleship sent limping from the fight.
He signaled his ships to withdraw; he dared to do no more.
He reckoned Halsey must be close and settled for a draw.
Three days and nights they waited, the men of the Sammy B.
Until those few who had survived were rescued from the sea.
As long as sailors go to sea and hold our banner high
Recall the mortal glory of these men who fought and died.
As long as the Navy sails the deep and serves for Liberty,
Honor these men who faced long odds and won the victory.

John F. McCullagh
Motel Sex (And The Filthy Socialist Pig)

It used to be that capitalists
were often called bad names.
Now Strauss-Kahn, the Socialist
Has had his walk of shame.
This strong and strident Socialist
Clad in his birthday suit,
Trapped a maid at his hotel
and dashed in hot pursuit.
He forced the young black immigrant
to get down on her knees.
He grabbed her hair within his fist
and made sure that he was pleased.
The suite where the assault occurred
goes for megabucks a night.
Shouldn’t a strident Socialist
use Motel Six by right?
Of course they’d be no mini bar-
just a dresser, bed and chair.
The chambermaid is eighty
and her looks don’t rate a stare.
It’s true she won’t do windows,
and her figure rates a yawn
But she probably won’t report him
And she’s leaving the lights on.

John F. McCullagh
Mouse Droppings

When she saw brown dots upon the rug, and more upon a chair.
The poor housewife was certain several mice resided there.
“I’ll need a cat. Or perhaps two, quite possibly I’ll need four.”
“This quantity of scat demands a feline killing corps.”
Just then her rotund husband opportunistically wandered in.
with a bag of Nestle morsels and brown stains upon his chin.
She watched him munch a handful, several dropping to the floor
Hard to believe someone that fat had ever missed his maw.
No killer cats were needed if spouse droppings was the source.
What the housewife really needed was a lucrative divorce.

John F. McCullagh
Move Over Moon

Move over Moon-
You’ve been displaced,
And it’s not some Star
That took your place.

Nor is a rose by another name
slipping in to steal your fame.
Their day is done
and none too soon.

Henceforth lovers who wish to swoon
must not rely upon the Moon,
must not invoke the mystic rose
must not implore the Northern star

Love needs the help of a guitar:
Beneath your lovers’ window stand
and strum a chord with practiced hand.
Sing your love a haunting tune:

which might include a mystic rose
which might invoke the Northern Star
which might implore the lovers’ moon.

It seems I've spoken way too soon.

John F. McCullagh
Must All Men Die

Hearts, it seems, are as fragile as dreams-
and quite as easily broken.
Frail as a paper valentine
Which is but true love's token.
The widow maker kills the king
Before needed words are spoken.
The card is turned and it is Death.
Hearts are too easily broken.

John F. McCullagh
My American Voice

This place is a museum now; this great hall where my father stood. Here he waited on line with all the rest. He waited for admission. He was dressed in his best with a few dollars in his pocket, and the address of his sister and her husband in New York.

There's a lady in the harbor here who holds her torch aloft for all.

My mother, Helen, was native, first generation born upon these shores. My father was a laborer; the quarries and mines had made him strong. His years in Scotland plus his native Irish brogue was baffling at first to those Ellis Island clerks.

There's a lady in the harbor here who holds her torch aloft for all.

My Dad found work building a bridge high above the waters reach. He started out a near illiterate but slowly learned to read From discarded copies of the New York Daily News. He met my mom at an Irish dance.

There's a lady in the harbor here who holds her torch aloft for all.

My mother's voice was all New York; a dialect of English speech. She loved her numbers, and clerked for Met Life, but she may have longed to teach. Instead she sat with me in our small kitchen Teaching me my numbers as our dinner was prepared.

There's a lady in the harbor here who holds her torch aloft for all.

For those of you who have heard me speak And found my own accent hard to place. I am a little of old New York and a little of a fair green place. My American voice is but the echoed music of my race.

There's a lady in the harbor here who holds her torch aloft for all.

John F. McCullagh
My Date With Alix (The Story Of O+)

She's not a conversationalist; I must let it be known.
but she got me faster into the sack than any girl I've known.
Lying there beside her, could she live up to the hype?
She stuck a needle in my vein; yes I am just "her" type.
I see the blood flow into her, she's seemingly insatiable.
The plasma she'll return to me, this Alix is sensational.
Three patients can be treated with each donation I supply.
It's national blood donor month so give Alix a try!

John F. McCullagh
My Little Valentine

For years now I have lived alone  
Since my marriage fell apart.  
In theory we’ve joint custody  
But that’s always how it starts.

I’m a salesman on the road  
About thirty weeks a year..  
My barkeep is the mini bar,  
Room service makes my meals.

But I was in town for Valentines  
And for my weekend with our girl  
I took her to her favorite place  
These days she’s my whole world.

All grown up at five years old  
And learning not to cry..  
She enjoyed the present that I brought  
Cause I’m her special guy.

I’m careful not to criticize  
her mom who’s now my Ex.  
.She also is considerate  
And I’m current with the checks.

We had a decent pasta meal  
I wisely passed on wine.  
As I enjoyed my night out on the town  
With my little valentine.

John F. McCullagh
My Overly Attentive Girlfriend

When first we met, I thought it cute
that I was sought, you in pursuit.
Your wide eyed look once seemed Divine
Till you told the Western world you’re mine
and then you sang, a bit off key,
That girls should keep their hands off me.
Plus I find it a tad obsessive
When you sewed my name in all your dresses.
As first dates go, ours wasn’t great
So what makes me your lifelong mate?
What once was flattering, I confess
has turned into an awful mess.
When I went Wendy’s for a burger
You heard the name and threatened murder.
We must break it off, I think it wise
that we both start seeing other guys.

John F. McCullagh
My Pesky Pecker

Each morning I'm awakened
by my annoying little friend.
As long as he has wood
he will be at it once again.
'Woody' has been with me now
for days beyond recall.
A Persistent little Pecker,
the little bugger gives his all.
For a month now he's been tapping
on the tree outside my den.
On weekends its annoying
cause I like to sleep till Ten.
I so wish someone would eat him,
perhaps the neighbor's cat,
and end his constant tapping
by putting paid to that.

John F. McCullagh
My Tree

Some time ago, I planted a sapling,  
a non-fruiting pear tree,  
in the back garden of my home.  
I planted it to take the place  
Of an older tree lost in a storm.  
I have watched it wax  
As I have waned.  
I know someday it will give its shade  
To others of my kind  
Who are to me unknown.

John F. McCullagh
My Weigh (To The Tune Of My Way')

And now, my weigh-ins near;  
Weight watchers makes a big production.  
I've cheated, had a few beers  
then gotten quotes for liposuction

I've eaten way past full  
and then had one more for the highway  
I've gotten old, I've gotten fat  
don't diet my way!

Baguettes, I've had a few, but then again, too few to mention  
I love my salty snacks  
but that's what gave me hypertension

I planned each 3 course meal  
at greasy spoons along the highway  
I've gotten old  
I've gotten fat  
don't diet my way

Yes there were times when I was blue  
Ice cream in quarts, I would go through  
but through it all, despite the gout  
I'd eat it in, or take it out  
I ate it all, - and I'm not tall  
don't diet my way

I've lunched, I've wined and dined  
I've had my failed attempts at losing  
but now my jeans just split  
and it no longer seems amusing.

To think I ate it all  
and may I say not in a shy way  
I've gotten old, I've gotten fat  
don't diet my way

For what is a meal without cake for desert  
and JOGGING IS DANGEROUS - a guy could get hurt
I ate the foods I truly craved
and never once was fashion's slave
The weight-in shows, I need new clothes
don't diet my way!

John F. McCullagh
N The Dock

I
The pale brunette
was asked to stand
and hear the verdict read.
One life hung in the balance,
one girl already dead....

Thumbs down,
and she would
be remanded.
grey days
in a prison drear.

Thumbs up
and she would
be restored
to those who held her dear.

Shifting slightly
from foot to foot.
She scarcely dared to breathe
The heart imprisoned in her breast
fairly bursting to be free..

Absolvo or Condemno
which would the verdict be?
The defendant was Amanda Knox
this day would see her free.

John F. McCullagh
Naked Girl

When Liberty lies bleeding
And the politicians laugh
Its poets who must rescue her
Or write her epitaph.

When Liberty lay naked, scorned
Upon the cobblestones
I gave my coat to be her robe
And brought her to my home

More dead than alive she seemed
I gave her tea to drink
She shivered at the memory
Of how low some people sink.

"My people once were proud and free"
She shook her head in shame.
"But lately they submit like slaves
To politician's games;"

"The State invades your privacy-
You mutely give assent."
What would Patrick Henry say
opposed to such offense? ."

"My treasury is plundered
By thieves the Banksters sent.
As we sink deeper into debt
Our Dollar's worth three cents."

"We borrow billions every day
To fight a faceless foe
Engaged in a "forever" war
As my strength erodes;"

When Liberty lies bleeding
And the politicians laugh
Its poets who must rescue her
Or write her epitaph.

John F. McCullagh
Name Droppers

J.K. Rowling is the latest
to call herself a bloke.
Three Bronte sisters
Made up male names
So they could write,
Not vote.
George Elliot
Was the nom de plume
of a British lady fair.
In Victorian times
It was de riguer
For a girl to feign
a pair.
Distaff scribes
Are not alone
In borrowing a name
Sam Clemens took
As “nom De Guerre”
The river cry
“Mark Twain”
And Stephen King
Who writes so fast
That he’s in overdrive
Adopted Bachmann
as a name
And used it
seven times.
George Orwell
Once was Erich Blair
Lewis Carroll
was Charles Dodson.
“The Hobbit”
Was my nom de plume
But now
I haven’t got one.

John F. McCullagh
Narcissa

There are guys who wed girls.
There are straight folks and gays.
There are those who like single life too.
A fellow in England once wed his T.V.
(I’ve known women in love with their shoes.)
But the strangest relationship
I ever heard tell
Was the woman who married herself.
She’d waited for years
For “Mister Right” to appear
and was tired up there on the shelf.
So she strolled down the Aisle
With a confident smile
(There was no need to give her away)
She composed her own vows
which drew much raves and wows.
While Justin Timberlake’s “Mirrors” song played.
She thought” who needs a spouse,
They just mess up your house.
So she bought a vibrator instead
She vacationed in France
Where no one looks askance
And took “Battery Bob’ to her bed”

Love is Love. I have heard
But this bond is absurd.
You know very well how this ends.
An expensive divorce in a year I forecast
But the Bride and the “Groom” will stay friends.

John F. McCullagh
Narrow Bed

When last I lay with you my Love-
lay with you in your narrow bed
in your room, off campus, near the mall.
in your last semester of Pre- Med.

That day I’d helped you move your things
And after our feast of pie and beer
You were loathe to let me go
In your narrow bed you held me near.

Your hair was then a fiery red
Your milk white breasts had known no sun
I kept eye contact as I inclined
to worship Venus with my tongue.

Later as our climax neared
Your ankles locked around my back
You gasped as we, together, came
A delightful little death was that.

Sweating in a chilly room
Your landlord didn’t give much heat
I held you then for the last time
Both knowing and not knowing that.

We grew apart, you moved away
I met the girl who’d be my wife
You had your practice in Atlanta
We both got along with life.

Thirty winters passed us by
I heard that you were back in town
I hurried out to visit you.
To see your face for one last time.
Your brother met me at the door-
The one who used to be a priest
He led me to the open casket
Where your body lay at peace

Streaks of grey were in your hair
The strain of cancer marred you face
But though the battle had been lost
Were you not now in a better place?

Laid out in a pale blue dress
A rosary wrapped around your hands
But if they were warm and capable-
Could they make me feel young again?

I left you, Ellen, one last time
Feeling overcome by tears
I clutched my coat against the cold
That reached for me across the years.

John F. McCullagh
National Clown Shortage

Registrations are way down at Clown Colleges today.
No one wants to scare small kids for the peanuts that they pay.
Older Bozos are alarmed that no one is enthused
to follow their profession and try to fill their shoes.
Sales of makeup are way down, ditto for funny clothes.
And vendors can't remember when they sold their last red nose.
When the one ring circus comes to town clowns will be hard to spot
The clown cars that they used to drive are rusting on the lot.
The reason for the scarcity is obvious to me;
All those with clown potential serve in Washington D.C.

John F. McCullagh
Nativity Scene

It seemed an inauspicious birth,
another mouth to feed on earth.

A stable in a crowded town,
the only lodging to be found.

Caesar Augustus had decreed
a census of his realm proceed.

As Bethlehem is David’s town
Its narrow streets were filled with sound.

Perhaps a midwife helped the girl
Produce the Savior of our world
Bringing forth her child in pain,
so that we might salvation gain.

Their little donkey oversaw
the baby swaddled on the straw.

Mother Mary did her best
to nurse the baby at her breast.
A whispering of angels may
Have directed Sheppards where they lay.
A conjunction, seeming like a star,
might lure Magi traveling far.

A folk in darkness witnessed light
Upon that primal Christmas night.
Blest be the child of Mary’s womb
And faithful hearts that give Him room.

John F. McCullagh
Neutrino

I sit in the bottom of a Well,
Its walls worn smooth by time.
Above, a solitary star,
One of seven sisters, shines.
Neutrinos in abundance,
like angels on a pin,
of minute mass, invisible
are forever pouring in.
All about me they dash by
Without an outward sign..
Even in these hidden depths
They’re an elusive find.
They speed on through to other fates
And leave me to my climb.

John F. McCullagh
Newcastle, 1936

In a humble little cottage
in a poorer part of town.
A tea kettle was whistling,
And the rain was pouring down.

Grandpa turned back from the window,
To where “mother” poured the tea.
“I’ve made some soda bread,
why don’t you come an sit with me?”

Grandpa did as he was bidden-
A cup of tea was just the thing,
in a delicate bone china cup
which bore a picture of the King.

As a stranger in a strange realm
He had worked the mines for years.
He had put food on the table,
He had endured this vale of tears.

Now the world he knew was gone
And work was hard to find
Germany was rising
Which sons would war take this time?

Back when he was young and strong,
with no hostages to time.
He’d had the chance to turn his back
on England’s harsher clime.

But then “mother’s” hair was golden
Her eyes a baby blue
Thoughts of leaving for America
paled next to thoughts of you.

He’d longed to travel far and wide
And see all sides of things.
He’d settled for his books and maps.
Some thoughts were childish dreams.
In a humble little cottage
in a poorer part of town.
A tea kettle was whistling,
And the rain was pouring down

John F. McCullagh
Nixon's The One!

Though born to a Quaker
Who would use “thee” and “Thou”
Nixon swore like a sea cook
fresh off some garbage scow.

Named for King Richard
Of dubious fame
He too was “deposed”
at the height of his game.

He was great at “red” baiting
and exploiting the scare.
He served on committees
That McCarthy would chair.

He was chosen as backstop
for likeable Ike
When incipient scandal
forced him to the mike.

With wife, Pat, beside him
In her ragged cloth coat,
A cocker spaniel named “Checkers”
Brought sobs to his throat.

When he debated young Jack
He appeared quite Hirsute
Nervous and sweating
in his ill fitting suit.

With a receding hairline,
A ski jump of a nose
and a five O’clock shadow
from the moment he rose.

He lost to a Kennedy
He lost to a Brown
Told the press that no more
would they kick him around

After years spent in exile
He returned to the fray
And defeated a Humphrey
Named Hubert one day.

John F. McCullagh
No Comfort, No Joy (Christmas At The Social Security Office)

You came into our office hopping on a wooden leg
You said if not for S.S.I. you’d surely have to beg.
I’ve bad news but there’s good news too
And this should cheer you up:

We all chipped in to buy you a tin cup, a tin cup

When you hit the streets you’ll have a new tin cup

You said you were disabled and you thought that you would die
Our team of crack physicians has determined it’s a lie.
There are lots of jobs that you can do with one leg and one eye

We regret that your claim has been denied, been denied

From the contents of your tin cup you’ll get by.

You came into our office favoring your one good knee
Your prostrate glad is swollen and you badly have to pee
Just don’t expect that you will get much sympathy from me

For we all have got problems of our own, of our own

Translated into Gaelic- Pog Mi Ohn

Notes  S.S.I. = Supplemental Security Income, a government stipend program

Pog Mi Ohn  = Kiss my rear  (keeping it clean)

John F. McCullagh
No Grexit

John Paul Satre could have written it; a play about these times.  
The Greek banks are closed on Holiday and Greeks all stand in line.  
Sixty Euros if you’re lucky, that’s the limit for the day.  
The Greeks are running out of Euros, and I’m afraid there’s Hell to pay.  
The people have rejected Merkel’s plan to be austere,  
And so the leftist government might finish out the year.  
Printing Drachmas in the basement has to be their back up plan;  
as they make their graceful Grexit may their creditors be dammed.  
Will Brussels send the Wehrmacht in to seize crops in the fields?  
You can only squeeze an olive once; there’s a limit on the yield.  
This isn’t debt that they can pay the pundits have opined.  
The can cannot be kicked again, this was the final time.  
Italy and Portugal both wait with bated breath;  
Along with Spain they want to see what Brussels will do next.  
Greece is a small country, one with a pleasant clime.  
What happens next is what you’d expect of Dominos in line.

John F. McCullagh
No Mercy

Private Henry Tandey,
in the service of his King.
had his chance to make a difference
at the battle of Marcoing.

A wounded German corporal
came into his line of sight,
Henry raised his rifle
and would have had him dead to rights.

But Henry was war weary
From his time in No man’s land
Who was it Henry didn’t kill?
Adolf Hitler was that man.

The little Corporal gave a nod
And hurried on his way,
Henry Tandey spared his life
to the entire world’s dismay

John F. McCullagh
No Ordinary Joe

Golden haired and handsome, Joe seemed to have it all.
He’d won a PAC 8 championship just that previous Fall.
Surely the Heisman would be his; another prize to win.
He started strongly, at least at first, but would falter at the end.

Joe Roth had Melanoma and it ravaged skin and bone,
It was a lonely battle, the hardest fight he’d known.
Joe Roth was a gamer who would strap his helmet on
and go out on the gridiron though his strength was nearly gone.
He knew that he would not grow old, or play the game for pay.
In this final autumn of his life he merely wished to play.

. Despite fatigue and nausea he still made every start,
Until his game clock ran out on an overburdened heart.
There’s a moment when the cheering stops, when a man feels most alone;
blind-sided by a tackle while checking down against the zone.

When game clock seconds tick away and the outcomes not in doubt
Joe stood tall in the pocket even when it was a rout.
He gave the game the best he had, then it was his time to go.
He was an All- American, and no ordinary Joe

John F. McCullagh
Nobody's Hero

He's nobody's hero,
never wanted to be.
Just one of a million
who were sent overseas.
He dropped into France
on a long ago night.
Near Mere St Eglise
where he joined in the fight.
'These are the real heroes'
and he points to the Stones
of his friends and comrades
who never came home.

John F. McCullagh
None Of The Above (Political)

I've listened to their speeches.  
Read their termite riddled planks.  
They're unlikely to dethrone Barrack-  
A pity, Mitt is no Tom Hanks.  
They are out of touch with women,  
unsympathetic to the poor.  
They're still fighting social issues  
that were decided years before.  
For a party of small government,  
They sure have a lot to say  
about Sex in America  
among the unwed and the gay.

The Democrats, by contrast,  
Hit all the right social notes;  
Indeed, they will say anything  
if it will buy them votes.  
Then, when we hit the fiscal cliff,  
The Obamas living large,  
I'm sure he'll find some Bush to blame  
as long as he's in charge.

Election Day is coming soon,  
Both parties seek my love.  
Alas, my favorite candidate  
is None of the Above.

John F. McCullagh
Not Tonight

Like a Siren calling me
Relentlessly to death,
My latent love of alcohol
haunts my every breath.

It started out quite innocent-
A scotch sipped here and there-
Progressing by degrees into
a sordid love affair.

A beer or three drunk at the game
And I was good company.
But, starting in the parking lot
I got disorderly.

Once a few drinks were consumed
Cold winter evenings lost their gloom-
Until my wife divorced me-
Now I live in rented rooms.

I managed, barely, while at work
I’ve got a union card.
I was often absent Mondays
which my boss thought very odd.

I had to find myself some help
To rise from my despair-
Wednesday nights in my church basement
There’s an A.A. meeting there.

I have a mentor guiding me
He’s been to Hell and back.
He always takes my phone calls
when Johnnie Walker wants me back..

And so I will not drink today
Ten weeks now I’ve been sober.
I spilled the drink into the sink-
I think... I hope it’s over.
While this is a work of fiction, it is a true story for many friends of Bill W.

John F. McCullagh
Now And At The Hour

We entered in the hospice room
where Mother lay alone.
By the scourge of this last illness
she'd been reduced to skin and bone.
Now at peace from suffering,
Her visage fairly shone.
The well worn beads
clasped in her hand
had helped her journey home.

'Now and at the Hour..'
a fragment of a childhood prayer.
Now and the hour
were joined together
in She for whom I cared.

John F. McCullagh
Oakland Lake

The sunlight, like a mother’s touch,
Is gentle on the water’s face.
The last warm breath of summer past
Not ready yet to yield its place

And you and I walk, hand in hand,
Around the long and winding path
Past where fledging Mallards stand
And weeping willows sweep the earth.

From beyond the rushes comes
The soulful melody of a horn..
All else is still, no sound intrudes
Upon the bassist and his song..

Above us Ninja squirrels fly
And bomb the path with acorn shells
If they should hit me do not laugh
Odds are that they’ll get you as well.

I’m glad we came to Oakland Lake,
Watch the waterfowl at play,
And have a quiet conversation
About a nearly perfect day.

John F. McCullagh
Obama-Car

In Detroit, the 'motor city'.
The wheels are off the cart.
Auto coverage? unaffordable-
four thousand just to park!
So many buy no coverage
or pretend they live elsewhere.
The apathy is palpable
Local government doesn't care.

There is a high court precedent
handed down from Robert's chair
The President must get involved
to save them from despair.
He will assess the situation
and appoint an auto czar.
to force all to buy insurance
It will be called 'Obama-Car'

John F. McCullagh
Of Christmas Past

There is a spot
atop a hill
beneath an old shade tree.
It is the place my parents rest
and thus is dear to me.

It is a pleasant spot they chose,
now blanketed in snow.
I place my wreath and give a thought
to a Christmas long ago.

That Christmas Eve my father brought
a tree that filled the room.
My brother worked to fix the lights.
The girls sang Christmas tunes.

Atop the tree an ornament
A star that shone like gold.
Reminder of the miracle
of Christmas long ago.

The house is gone
and they have gone
The youngest has grown old.
Still I recall my sisters song
and that star that shone like gold.

John F. McCullagh
Of Men And Mice

When Ebola's fever begins to rage,
The prognosis isn't nice,
Monoclonal antibodies
are needed from three mice.
The mice must first become exposed
to a weakened viral strain.
Their antibodies harvested
and combined with those of man.
Strangely the proteins that we need
are grown best in a weed.
A modified tobacco plant
will do the job indeed.
The serum, that derives from plants,
had not had human trials.
(but eight of ten young chimpanzees
endorse what's in that vial.)
Our missionaries, sick unto death
were clearly in no position
to refuse to try the medicine
that might provide remission.
Their rebound was miraculous.
To Atlanta now they fly.
Man finds himself in debt to a mouse.
"Good job, little guy!"

John F. McCullagh
Offensive Advertising

The American Cremation society
Is offering 'hot deals’” this week.
We get pitches for Pfizer's viagra
by snail mail, on Facebook, by Tweet.

Brochures for an all senior residence
litter our nightstand these days.
There silver haired ladies and gentlemen
pop pills for their nightly forays.

There are bankruptcy ads on the radio
to help manage credit card debt.
There are pill ads to help me remember
what drink used to help me forget.

The cars that they hawk to us seniors
Are designed to just putter around
Not for me Candy apple red Corvettes
To race about with the top down..

I’m stuck in the prune demographic
Where ensure and ex lax abound.
I still have my own teeth, and don’t need drugs to sleep,
But my Glasses have yet to be found.....

John F. McCullagh
Oh, Rahm, Oh, Rahm Emmanuel

Oh, Rahm oh Rahm Emmanuel,
the mayor of our fair Chicago town
The people here are stuck with you I fear,
Unless another candidate appears.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
one in three still think you're doing swell

You came, so well connected from on high,
and never let a crises go to waste;
To us the path of knowledge show,
by closing schools and letting teachers go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
one in three still think you're doing swell

Oh, Rahm oh Rahm Emmanuel
the homicides are rising by the score.
Guardsmen called to enforce civil law
In places where police will go no more,
Rejoice Rejoice Emanuel
one in three still think you're doing swell

Oh, come Barrack Obama's right hand man,
From prosperity you will deliver them
That trust your mighty pow'r to save;
They'll re-elect you with votes from the grave
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
one in three still think you're doing swell

Oh, come, our Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by your drawing nigh,
In Chicago folks stay home at night,
for fear of death and that ain't right
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
One in three still think you're doing swell

Oh, come, Desire of nations, bind

www.PoemHunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive
In one the hearts of all mankind;  
don't deviate from the party line  
til all Chicagoans are left behind.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
One in three still think you're doing swell

John F. McCullagh
Old Glory

The soldiers are (sadly) well-rehearsed, their ritual precise.
The familiar simple tune of "Taps" plays out on a devise.
Orders are given and obeyed, the honor guard takes hold:
The Star spangled banner is reduced to a triangular fold.
The grieving widow, dressed in black, her young son at her side,
accepts this most unwanted gift -that never is denied.
She holds it close, all she has left, a symbol of her pride.
That flag will hold an honored place, forever, in her care,
In memory of one who went to war and is no longer here.

John F. McCullagh
Old Number Seven

A doubleheader in the Bronx.
Bright sunshine floods the end of May,
Old number Seven at the plate,
Mantle on his last good day.

A pair of homers, five for five.
The legs are wrapped, he strides with pain
Mickey takes the bases slow
He has to sit the second game.

It would have been a fitting end
to wave his cap and walk away.
To end like Ruth and Williams did
and homer on his final day.

But Jimmy Foxx is still in reach
so Mickey drags himself to play.
The Cathedral in the Bronx half empty
Few come to watch him fade away.

Mclain and Lonberg are ahead
Five Thirty Six and Mick is done
Long shadows stalk the center field
that he patrolled when he was young.

John F. McCullagh
On A Sunday Morning Sidewalk

On a Sunday morning sidewalk
in a brief, refreshing, rain
I awaken, quite hung over,
My eyes closed against the pain.

The fresh mowed grass of someone's lawn
Damp with the morning dew
Reminds the brain cells I have left
that last night I downed a few.

A dark figure now looms over me-
Is it there to damn or save?
No it's just the barkeeps Labrador
as he gives my face a lave.

I was nearly frightened sober -
And I was still drunk with Grog-
I'd prefer a friendly Saint Bernard
bringing a 'hair of the dog.'

The Labrador looked down on me,
a sodden drunken mess.
In my wife's eyes I would never find
That canines kind forgiveness..

John F. McCullagh
On Being Right

I met a man the other day who proclaimed he was right
in his smug assured way.
As I listened I wondered ' How can this be? '
when all he held sacred seemed profane to me.
I conducted a survey, I asked all around;
opinions, like assh*les, were thick on the ground.
Some followed a Prophet, others swore by a book.
Some would kill you to save you if that's what it took.
In a pantheon of idols, theirs was the true God.
All the others are fakes- which I found rather odd.
I admired their certainty; their faith seemed so strong.
Yet doubt tempts me to wonder if everyone's wrong.
We all think we're right which can lead to disaster,
both here and now and then in the hereafter.

John F. McCullagh
On Forgetting

The thing about losing one's mind Is that it doesn't happen all at once. No, the loss is a creeping gradual thing, never occurring in a nonce. It starts with some forgotten names; some dear, some famous but, to you, not. Next you're at a loss for words you've often used but now cannot. You find yourself on an oft trod trail which suddenly is strange and new. Its getting dark, its growing cold and the police have to be sent for you. There is a fear that chills the soul that only knows that it knows not. Hanging on that precipice fearing you will be forgot Yet when that last forgetting comes your fear will be forgotten too. And you'll greet Death like an old friend whose name will surely come to you.

John F. McCullagh
On That First Of July

On that First of July (the battle of the Somme 7/1/1916)

The officer's whistle blew and we rose up
into the stiff wind of German fire.
Whole companies disappeared in the smoke
While tangled up in razor wire.
Our generals were exposed as fools;
Their tactics drawn from earlier wars
Our young conscripts, bayonets fixed,
were fed into the cannons maw.
Nineteen thousand young Brits dead,
Thirty thousand wounded more.
We gained so little ground that day
so little for that blood and gore.
A generation raised on tales
of the glory and romance of war,
has learned today the hard harsh truth
Wisdom gained through suffering is universal law.

John F. McCullagh
On The State Of Things

My once rich topsoil clouds the seas

    Man’s pesticides are poisoning me

    This creature talks about his “right”

    as he ushers in forever night.

What about the rights of those

Who did not wear designer clothes?

Those who fur or feathers wore

    and eked out life by tooth and claw.

My ocean’s are awash with trash,

Over fished and fading fast.

Ever larger swaths of sea

    Hypoxic, anaerobic be.

On land, my tale is much the same

From space, behold my forests burn

The little parasites descend

    And rip my treasures from within.
Where once my oceans teemed with life
They’re silent, nearly empty now
And fields that once would gleam with grain
Befoul my air with flatulent cows.

Even my humble worker bees
Are dying off because of man
Are you prepared for silent springs?
Will death from hunger stalk the land?

Have you no awe, have you no fear?
Have you no thought of what’s to come?
Where once there was a paradise-
a dying sphere, a heartless sun.

John F. McCullagh
On This, The Last Night Of Our World

On this, the Last night of our world
We, together, naked, lay
Upstairs in your parents house
in the middle of the day.

Our ship has sailed- and without us
Future joys now chimeras
and your oft mischievous eyes
are brimful with incipient tears.

Our intercourse, just whispers, there
Your hand rests casually on my thigh
Although you are warm to my touch
I spurn the urge to spend and die.

Another love has staked its claim
A shadow cast upon our sun
This parting will forever last
Our Stage Romance has had its run.

Later when I'm home alone
I pour myself another drink
And mourn my loss, the perfect girl
on this, the last night of our world.

John F. McCullagh
Once Upon A Time

My song concerns a buried grief
Another place and time
A sorrow that our clan endured,
the days of Auld ang Syne.

Our parents’ lives hold mysteries
We seldom can divine
Like why my Dad would leave the room
When he’d hear Auld Ang Syne

The faces at the table change
The names effaced by time
We struggle to remember them
Back once upon a time

His sister, Kat, nursed old and sick
in the Flu Pandemic times
Then her bright candle sputtered out
Back once upon a time.

When her father heard the news
He nearly lost his mind
He never after sang again
And seldom would he smile

Her brother up in Aberdeen
Heard as New Year Chimed
He dried his tears upon his sleeve
The strains of Auld Ang Syne

The faces at the table change
The names effaced by time
We struggle to remember them
Back once upon a time

John F. McCullagh
One Christmas Eve, 1938

The snow was gently falling,
the gusts of wind the only sound.
The branches of the trees were white,
Snow drifted on the ground.

The couple walking through the snow
wore layers of warm clothes.
Their cheeks, half frozen from the cold,
the only skin exposed.

How good it felt to step inside
And close the wind away.
Soon the kettle made a cheery sound-
Hot chocolate on its way.

In the corner stood a Christmas tree
The best they could afford
Dressed with tinsel and with ornaments
to celebrate the Lord.
Theirs was not the largest house
Nor the newest on the block
They tried hard to live sensible
by staying out of hock.

Last Christmas had been difficult
Jobs had been hard to find.
The husband worked at two or three
Taking what he could part time.

This Christmas looked much better.
They were comfortable and warm
They listened on the radio
To a sweet Tenor’s Christmas song

In the distance they heard church bells chime
As Midnight mass was sung
And the babe, there in the manger,
was revealed to old and young.

Her husband held her in his arms
as she opened up his gift.

He thought she rather liked it

By her warm and loving kiss.

John F. McCullagh
One Hallow's Eve

There's a graveyard down, beside the glen near where the shop man dwells.
The woods are deep and none dare sleep when the banshees scream and yell.

That's where two brothers lay a trap to scare their sisters dear.
Their sisters, returning from the dance, by twilight would be here.

Some bones they'd found from some dead beast long buried in the bog.
They'd lit a Candle in the Skull and practiced moaning loud.

There's a graveyard down, beside the glen near where the shop man dwells.
The woods are deep and none dare sleep when the banshees scream and yell.

The girls returning from the dance found not what you'd suppose:
Some scattered bones, some ashes and their little brothers' clothes.

The town folk searched the hills for days For Henry and his brother John
They never found the bodies that were buried in the bog.

There's a graveyard down, beside the glen near where the shop man dwells.
The woods are deep and none dare sleep when the banshees scream and yell.

John F. McCullagh
One Last Wish

The old man at the hospice
was in a world of pain.
His sight was gone,
his heart grew weak
and not much time remained.

I don't recall who asked the question,
but I was struck by his reply.
It contained a world of wisdom
from a soul about to die.

Someone had asked the dying man
'If wishes were for free-
and I could grant you one last wish
what would that last wish be? '

He didn't wish for fortune
He didn't lust for fame
He cared not a whit for money
or to escape his gnawing pain.

' I think, if I had one last wish
before my times gone by-
I'd be a babe in my mother's arms
and hear a lullaby.'

' That would be a good way to pass
- not soaked in urined sheets-
but comfortably in Mother's arms
and gently rocked to sleep.'

That very night the old man died,
He passed on in his sleep.
I hope he's in his mother's arms
with no more cause to weep.

John F. McCullagh
One Night In Downtown Flushing

The gates of hell were opened wide
and beckoned me within.
Alas I can’t read all the signs
Because my name’s not “Chin”

I wandered through emporiums
Overwhelmed by sights and sound
If you would like a duck or goat
I’m sure one could be found.

Bubble tea and sushi bars
Compete here cheek and jowl
And from the Karaoke bar
One hears a drunkard howl.

A slightly built masseuse then smiled
And gestured me come in
But they’d be no “Happy Ending” there
Because that “she”’s a “him”

I wandered dazzled and confused
And doubts arose a pace
Is this not Roosevelt Avenue?
Has Flushing been erased?

John F. McCullagh
One Night Only

When I was young and callow and could run for twenty miles I met a woman, Karen, both sophisticate and kind.

We met while on vacation, I was her junior by five years. Her eyes a vivid, limpid blue-marred recently by tears.

She was on the rebound from an instance of heart break. I was young and willing and, to be honest, a mistake.

It was a thrill to take her hand and be invited in I watched her undress slowly so our passion could begin.

We did not get much sleep at all though I'll not kiss and tell. I will say for her recent loss I stood in very well.

When I awoke next morning She had dressed and gone away. I never saw her face again or spoke about our play.

We loved for one night only when we wrestled in the sheets... How bittersweet came morning with no chance of a repeat.

John F. McCullagh
One Night With You

Within your arms
I find myself.
The hour late,
the house asleep.
Lips conjoined
In fair affection
No need for sleep,
We’ve reached perfection.

Within your eyes
I lose myself.
The hour late,
the house asleep.
Hips conjoined
In fair affection.
How fortunate I
brought protection..

Within your room
We find ourselves.
one hour later,
the house asleep.
My gorgeous Flautist
Hums a selection
In present hope
of the resurrection.

John F. McCullagh
One Sixth Of June

It seems, today, a peaceful place,
a sandy beach, a wine dark sea.
The grand assault, the thousand ships;
It rivals Troy in myth-story
.
Fate often hinges on one day-
the moment when the dice are tossed.
Here they breached the Atlantic wall
Here many a Mother’s son was lost.

One sixth of June was such a day.
And on that day the sea ran red.
Mine is a tale of butchery;
of many wounded, many dead.

One sixth of June, the storm now passed,
From out the fog, our fleet, they spied.
The heavy guns commenced to fire.
In a fearful rain of lead, men died.

What was in the souls of men
who breached the wall and turned the tide?
The Tommies and Americans
faced odds so close to suicide.

Some lived to tell of that longest day;
the sixth of June in forty four.
So many others fought and fell
and sleep in Normandy evermore.

John F. McCullagh
One Taken, One Left

They were brothers born a year apart,  
the elder just nineteen.  
Folks said they were inseparable-  
Unbeatable as a team..

But elder brother went to war  
in far off Vietnam.  
His brother vividly recalls  
The day He heard Jim’s gone.

Never again to take the field,  
Or hear his voice again.  
A Lifetime's conversation  
brought prematurely to an end.

One was taken, one was left,  
Both forever changed.  
One brother is forever young-  
There in the picture frame.

The Younger is the elder now  
Each year he grows more grey.  
Sufficient is the evil  
He has dealt with since that day

John F. McCullagh
Two poets, Oxford men, both of them,
met by chance on the field of woe.
They were prepared to charge the Boche
when they heard the whistle blow.
For King and Country, to gain a yard,
to bleed and suffer like some god.
One would be taken, the other left

A mortar Shell made its quick work.
The lad had scarcely time to scream.
His fellow stared, in shock, to see.
A pink mist where Clive used to be.
The charge soon faltered in fading light
The survivors lay low in Niemanns land.
A line from Matthew dogged each breath:
One was taken, the other left.

John F. McCullagh
One Woman’s Right To Choose

I have never been an advocate
Of “woman’s right to choose”
because I think an infant’s life
is too precious to lose.

In the case of Marie Fleming,
I might plead for an exception:
This brave Irish woman,
Her body wracked with mortal pain,
Sought surcease from suffering-
a peaceful rest to gain.

She did not fear that final breath
as the young and healthy do.
She sought a death with dignity-
the same as me and you.

MS was her enemy-
She could not do the deed.
She asked the courts to let friends help
To be there in her need.

Denied of an assisted end,
Marie died yesterday.
I hope that she passed peacefully
and sleeps til Judgment day.

Her wicker casket was borne to church,
She rests there in the yard.
She bore pain unendurable
before she met her God.

We are more merciful to pets
When they face shorter odds
Than the courts were to Marie
Who’d been dealt the thirteenth card.

John F. McCullagh
Only The Lonely

They finally did it,
so often they'd tried.
The whole Human race,
dead, a suicide.

The people I'd chosen
made war on Iran,
Until the last dropp of Isaac
bled out on the sand.

Their allies engaged
and the dread missiles flew.
Nuclear winter
took care of a few.

The rivers of Babylon
clotted with dead.
So it was written.
So it was said.

The tribes of the Prophet
and Abraham's clan
took everyone with them
so I understand.

I really will miss them.
If I had eyes, I cry.
They only knew How,
They stopped asking 'Why'.

Their Cities are silent,
filled with cockroaches only,
They consigned me to Myth
and now I am lonely.

John F. McCullagh
Open The Door To Yesterday

I walked this campus in my youth,
fifty years ago today.
The air is sweet from recent rain
here on the quad lawn where we played.

It's changed, of course,
that building is new.
Jefferson Hall is next, they say.
I graduated here in May.
I need not give the year away
I 'll only say it was a time,
like now, of great uncertainty.

I remember you like yesterday,
Your eyes a deep cerulean blue.
Your long and flowing auburn hair.
Those bee stung lips so sweet and true.

On impulse, just then
I tried the door.
Surprised I was when it gave way
I entered in the Bursars room
and heard your voice just down the hall.

For sure, twas you.
I'd know that voice
if all the world should pass away
I made my way towards your voice
anticipating ecstasy.

A joyful union there awaits
to hold you once more in my arms
life beyond death to be united
with you so many years since gone.

I entered then into the room
in hopes that she I loved was there.
This was the place where we first met
a place where, sadly, none appeared.
A wistful smile, a final glance
from your poor poet of Romance.
too much a dreamer, most would say,
as I closed the door to yesterday

John F. McCullagh
Oscar Wilde

Absinthe made his heart grow fonder
of the frail blonde Lord of his same gender.
The Marquis of Queensbury, who always fought dirty,
thought Oscar a lightweight both flighty and flirty.

The Victorian age thought Gay love was a shame
and called it the” Love that dared not speak its name.”
They threw Oscar in prison for loving a man
And he never saw his own two children again.

Where before he’d be worshipped for his style and his wit
Prison had changed him much more than a bit.
He could no longer write comedy in his usual style.
So he left London for Paris to Sojourn a while.

Oscar Wilde was a man who loved Women and Men
He made a good living with the nib of his pen.
He died as the century was turning the page:
the pride of old Erin, a wit and a sage.

John F. McCullagh
Our House With The Rotary Phone

I sit in a room that no longer exists
On a chair long since splintered and gone
While I pick at a meal I once would devour
in our house with the rotary phone.

I sit in the room that doesn’t exist
Enjoying my choice of ice creams
Recalling the window in Tiffany glass
Forgive an old man his daydreams

A simple “A” frame with three beds and a bath,
obsolete, yes, but our home.
It stood with its’ sisters on Queens borough Hill,
where the L.I.E. jams are well known.

I had known for some time that her best days were gone
A plywood fence circled our home
Title had passed to a contractor’s hands
Neglected, our house looked forlorn

My past like a picture ripped from its frame
They left not a stone on a stone
Not even the numbers on wood painted green
of our house with the rotary phone.

Our house and its twin have been wrecked and removed
And replaced with a modern brick “home”
So pardon my tear as I stand at the bier
Of our house with the rotary phone

John F. McCullagh
Our New Privacy Policy

First we want to assure you, your privacy is our first concern. After all, we know all about you, and we know how much you earn. Every keystroke is duly noted, and the sites where you return, will fuel the ads you see for you have cash to burn! We sell you out to retailers who want to sell on line. Day and night, it matters not, we’re watching all the time. We strip you naked for a fee, it’s how we earn our penny. Our policy on privacy is that you haven’t any!

John F. McCullagh
Out

The prognosis was distressing.
The outlook was the same.
My aging mother could not eat,
we were playing her endgame.
Bereft of speech and cogent thought,
sitting in her chair with wheels.
Her fate placed firmly in our hands,
in the court of no appeals.
A feeding tube could well extend
her life for twenty years.
A life in limbo that way leads
where none can care or feel.
Pain management and hospice care
was the choice we had to make.
Years later some still argue
we had made a vile mistake.
Yet if my fate should be like hers
be kind and let me die.
A gentle exit into night
once life become a lie.

John F. McCullagh
Out At Home

Jackie Robinson is exalted
as the first Black man to play,
but far fewer fans remember Glenn Burke,
the first ballplayer openly gay.

Like Jackie, he played for the Dodgers-
(different coast and a different time.)
Glenn came up to the Majors
In the summer of 79'

Burke was strong and tall and fast
And some teammates called him "King Kong;"
Though he roomed with Reggie Smith on the road
most nights Reggie Smith slept alone.

Burke befriended Young Tommy Lasorda
which was why he was traded away.
Old Lasorda couldn't deal with the rumors,
Nor acknowledge his own son was gay.

Glenn Burke rode the pines while in Oakland
Billy Martin never gave him much chance
When Burke injured his leg in Spring Training
That ended his time at the dance.

He drifted, his playing days over,
He used, he stole and did time.
An accident left him a cripple
Unprotected sex ended his line.

No shock was the A.I.D.s diagnosis-
His sister had long known he was gay.
When she took him in he was dying
when all others turned him away.

Sandy Alderson, with the Athletics,
took pity on Burke in despair.
The team paid for his A.I.D.S. medication
and covered the cost of his care.
Sad is the fate of the Athlete unsung,
dying apart from his team.
Glenn Burke showed that a gay man could play,
That a Gay Athlete also can dream.

Glenn Burke passed a long time ago
But his story deserves to be told.
He said when your suffering, dying of A.I.D.S.
Even days in the summer are cold.

John F. McCullagh
Out At The Plate

My teammates don’t know.
Surely none can suspect-
When I leave from the game
I don’t go home direct.

My lockers my closet,
And in it I hide
my alternate lifestyle
That some wear with pride

Reporters surround me
on the locker-room prowl
I patiently answer,
Dripping wet in a towel.

I’m a likeable guy
And I don’t duck the press
And they never suspect
How I look in a dress.

My lockers my closet,
And in it I hide
my alternate lifestyle
That some wear with pride.

I’ve been a star
in the City for years.
If fans knew what I’m hiding
Would I still hear the cheers?

Sure, you see me around
With a girl on my arm-
But if they want more
I back off in alarm.

It’s kind of ironic-
fans express their envy -
Could they live with the fear
of exposure like me?

My lockers my closet,
And in it I hide
my alternate lifestyle
That some wear with pride.

John F. McCullagh
Out On The Trail

While on the Appalachian trail
Out hiking in the wood
I accidently ventured close
to a Grouse’s brood.

The mother bird could not surmise
The path I’d choose to take.
She saw her family threatened
by some trouser wearing ape.

So with undaunted Courage,
She came running through the brush.
Had I been the great white hunter
She might have wound up as our lunch.

But I’m a lover, not a fighter
And I turned tail down the hill.
Had my laughing friends not called me back
I might be running still.

My advice to would be hikers-
Bring a slow friend as a spare-
He might just come in handy
should you run into a bear.

John F. McCullagh
Overdose

As she stepped into the M.E.'s chamber
The light was uncomfortably bright.
The policeman held her by one arm
As she took in an unwelcome sight:
A sheeted body lay on a slab,
a human who had come to harm.
The medical examiner pulled back the sheet
And she could no more deny.

Her son looked peaceful and composed,
almost as if he was asleep.
The needle tracks upon his arms
Betrayed addictions hold were deep.
"Yes" she said, "this is my son." There was little else to tell.
She claimed his body from the state
thus sparing him a pauper's grave.
An Overdose was ruled the cause
The antidote administered was too late
With ceremony she buried him
In hopes of Heaven, in fears of Hell
Her tears betray a common grief
In Purgatory now she dwells.

John F. McCullagh
Owd To A Nightingale

It was quiet in the park,
after lunch, the crowds are few.
Here the statures live in terror
because of what we pigeons do..
We’re adept at carpet bombing.
pets and people feel our wrath.
Our bowels are like loose cannons-
Don’t dare venture in our path.

Now, below, I see a poet
with pen in hand composing.
Intent upon the songbird’s tune
or perchance he’s merely dozing

His senses lulled by cricket’s song,
He perspires in the heat.
My calling card left on his suit.
says chose a different seat.

John F. McCullagh
Pandora's Box

The release was unintentional, the Public was assured.
No vaccines were available, not that they'd have cured.
For every ten infected, they knew that eight would die.
more lethal than Ebola, and the people wondered why?

It was born in a researcher's lab, a variant of the flu;
the strain from 1918 that murdered millions too.
Why he was let to do this work, I cannot understand.
Sadly we can't ask him as he died by his own hand.

It preyed on old and young alike, it slaughtered rich and poor.
The dead were left unburied, and the pestilence slaughtered more.
It was clear the Horsemen rode that night, we heard their banshee scream.
We decided if we were to die, that first we'd have Poteen.

Poteen is a potent brew, distilled three times by hand.
Its an old family recipe handed down by my old man.
As golden drops poured in each glass we raised a toast on high:
"We salute thee, Mighty Lord, we who are about to die."

A Warmth of stupefaction went coursing through our veins.
When we finally sobered up, no pathogens remained.
Who knew my father's recipe could put the plague to flight?
We saved as many as we could; no man went dry that night.

The Sun shone on a brave new world, the air was fresh and clean..
The rivers still flowed to the Seas and Eagles still took flight
The Politicians all had died; both the Left and Right.
We left the Cities far behind and lived upon the land,
And never was a jug of "dew" far from my right hand.

John F. McCullagh
Passchendaele

Although we were told that casualties would be high, still we rose up, answering the officer's whistle-moving our legs through the muck-cutting our way through the barbed wire of doubt-

We charged across Love's minefield driving the foe before us at this, Love's Passchendaele.

John F. McCullagh
Patti Smith, By Maplethorpe

The shirt is borrowed, as is the tie
All else is mine to give, no lie.
Like a sweet symbiont song
I am true word and true chord.

Immortal here I seem to be-
Forever young, forever free.
You took me with your S.L.R.
Exposed for all the world to see.

Though it seems I would undress
And though it’s true my hair’s a mess
I’ll go no farther—what a shame
I’m stuck here in this picture frame.

John F. McCullagh
Pearl, The Aftermath

TAP, TAP, TAP- Over here! Over here!
We hear their frantic tapping.,
sailors trapped in the capsized ship
with the water levels rising.

We work with acetylene Torches,
work quickly as the December sun dies.
The smell of blood and oil mixes
I'm too numb to let myself cry.

Work is my only salvation
for me and the men down below.
I am racing with time to their rescue
A race I might lose even so.

Tap, tap, tap, the sound growing fainter
some sailors have died as they wait
Others survive, breathing foul air
Praying for deliverance from fate.

My naked back glistens with Sweat
as we manage a breech in the hull
I grasp the hand of a survivor,
a stranger who now I knew well.

The sun settles red in the West
A red ball like I saw on the planes.
Yet Pearl is not totally dark
we continue to work by its flames

John F. McCullagh
Perchance

My darling, sleep, and never wake.
though it may cause my heart to break,
The morphine drip is a kinder fate
than that which would befall you.

Swollen limbs, incessant pain,
The Doctors think just days remain.
When life is only life in name,
No joy remains before you.

So hold my hand in your tight grip
as when our youngest child was born.
I promise I won't let it slip
Until it is no longer warm.

You gifted me with forty years.
In health and sickness, we were a team.
Now, at last, you are at peace,
Sleep my love, perchance, to dream

John F. McCullagh
Perfect Ice Cube Recipe

A cup of cold branch water,  
triple filtered, extra dry.  
Bring it to a rolling boil-  
in a moment you'll see why.  
Pour it into ice cube trays  
and place it in the freezer  
This recipe is tried and true  
obtained from an old geezer.

Wait two hours, then remove  
the ice cubes from their tray.  
Notice they are crystal clear,  
ever cloudy cracked or grey.  
Place some in a six ounce glass  
making sure that none are wasted  
then add a single malt and sip  
the best ice cubes ever tasted.

John F. McCullagh
Personal Calls

Telemarketers get a bad rap.
People call us impersonal drones.
We’re just trying to eke out a living,
armed just with a script and a phone.

My place is called “Cubicle City”.
It’s the dream of a lifetime for me:
Five thousand square feet of space underground
where the bowl-a mat once used to be.

Joey is one of my workers,
For years he’s been one of my best.
He knew how to deal with rejection
and make many more sales than the rest.

Just lately, his work has been suffering.
Last night he was crying on phone.
I see he’s been calling one number
far too often. I see that it’s his own.

Now I am a curious fellow
about all these short calls to his home.
I pick up my handset and dial it
to tell her to leave Joe alone.

Of course I would get a recording;
A woman’s voice, honeyed and sweet,
It seductively says “leave a message,
when you hear the sound of the beep.”

Puzzled, I asked his co-worker
To tell me, when Joe’s not around,
“What has been up with him lately?
I notice that Joe has seemed down.”

Judy tells me that Joe’s wife had left him.
For weeks he’s been living alone.
The calls have become his obsession;
Just to hear his wife’s voice on the phone.
I nod, but elect to do nothing;  
I, too, had a wife of my own.  
I recall when she left me- just four barren walls  
and the sound of her voice on the phone.

John F. McCullagh
Phoebe Prince

An immigrant from County Clare
brought to this harsher clime-
Phoebe Prince, an Irish rose,
a gentle heart and mind.

First used, and then discarded
by one boy, then another.-
Object of the mean girl’s scorn
Phoebe was “the outsider”

On the last day of her short life
They hounded her from school.
The girl they called the “Irish slut”
was made to feel the fool..

Her sister, Lauren, found her body
hanging lifeless in the hall.
Befriended by nobody
Phoebe chose to end it all

And on the day they held her wake
Those monsters held their dance
A debutante cotillion
for a troop of soulless tramps.

She’s buried here in County Clare
because the Ocean’s waves
separate her from the harpies
who drove her to the grave

John F. McCullagh
Photograph And Memory

In my hands I hold a photograph
That, for years, I hadn't seen-
It's the only one I've left now
from when we were seventeen.

You head cocked slightly to the right,
You strike a playful pose.
Your blue eyes fairly sparkle
above a button nose.

Your skin is fair and freckled
No makeup, none required.
Peasant blouse and chinos
are your casual attire.

Here too, is the letter that you wrote
The week my father died-
Some years had passed since seventeen-
You were no longer by my side.
You said he'd taught me how to love-

a consequential gift.

I'd had such a good teacher

That, in me, his spirit lived.

The ink is faint and faded-

the fault of light and time.

Or is it tears and fading vision

that makes it hard to read this time?

It's strange the things a man retains

as time starts to expire.

The memory of your kisses

in some neuron's random fire.

As this world counts beauty

You'd rank pretty, I suppose

But if I was the little prince

I'd choose you for my rose.

John F. McCullagh
Photographs Without Memories

Not on your lips,
No, not anytime soon.
Your mind has become
Like the dark side of the moon.
Full of holes and lacunae
and dark shadowy walls.
Sometimes words fail you,
More often, recall.
I show you a picture
Of when you were young
I can see it’s a struggle,
on the tip of your tongue.
I wish you could help me
Match names and faces
 Caught here in print
In silvery traces
If only a synapse could snap into place
Give you back the dignity
That time has erased.
Then you could name these comrades
headed off to the war.
Maybe then could you tell me
where past years are.

John F. McCullagh
Pink Triangle

I remember when I walked the Earth
in the days before I died.
When Reich chancellor Hitler rose,
after the Reichstag fire.

I remember a November night
with a million shards of glass.
I never felt more all alone,
that night my lover passed.

After that, I had no rights,
I was forced to bear this sign:
A pink Triangle swatch of cloth,
by this I was defined.

I remember some with David's star
would look down their nose at me.
Yet We were under the same sentence-
had not our deaths all been decreed?

I remember when I walked the Earth
in the days before I died.
Before mein Fuhrer dug for me
my grave up in the sky.

John F. McCullagh
Pitchers And Catchers

It’s the 21st day and there’s snow on the ground
It covers home plate and it’s piled on the mound.
It’s dumped in the infield; it’s heaped on the seats.
The ballpark is silent, not even a tweet.

But sooner than later we’ll all hear the sound
Of ball hitting glove as it gets tossed around.
Pitchers and Catchers are soon to report
A sign Spring is coming much sooner than thought.

The camps are all opening early this year
In just weeks I'll be watching from up in the Tier
My Yanks will be better than Shakespeare I hear
As Pettite plays Hamlet and Posada King Lear.

John F. McCullagh
Play On

For Forty years he’d played and coached
and referred the game.
Now Alzheimer’s stolen
nearly all except his name.
With his past now dis-remembered
and all hope of a future gone
what else was there left to him
except to just play on.
The pickup game he’d played for years
Became his sole relief
He played with men he once knew well
before he met time’s thief.
You see him running on the pitch
with purpose, or with none.
And if he goes off sides at times
his friends say no harm done.
Like a child, he chases balls.
His scoring touch is gone.
Yet, in the moment, he finds joy
And so he just plays on.

John F. McCullagh
It was protracted suicide
Poe, dead before his time.
At the end he sold his clothes for drink
He was found the worse for wine.
A horror, like the tales he'd spun,
mad visions stalked his days.
This master of the Macabre
this day found a common grave.
No Raven croaked as he lost hope
of an earthly parole.
His doctor heard his final words:
'Lord, please save my poor soul.'

John F. McCullagh
Poetential

Dull sublunary lovers need
the help of 3D glasses
to ever seen things differently,
or grasp just what romance is.

We poets see things differently
because we take more chances.
The seen and unseen, we embrace
without cardboard enhancers.

Could Love even express itself
without our helpful similes?
Honor or Courage, without our help,
would be just pale facsimiles.

We are the guardians of the words
that hollow men would empty.
Poetential is our flaming sword
against their verbal entropy

John F. McCullagh
Police Action

Did George Bush err in making war?  
Was his pretext false, his premise flawed?  
Was force deployed in the Middle East  
just when we can afford it least?  
We're like a prehistoric beast  
that jumps its prey and sinks its teeth.  
Both enmeshed in pits of tar  
Both doomed to perish in their war.  
At least George Bush let Congress act.  
in ousting Saddam from Iraq.  
Obama bombs Libya without surcease  
This isn't war, we're the police.  
Yet to the casualties on the ground  
that distinction has a hollow sound.

John F. McCullagh
Svelte and Pettite, just five foot three,
My Geminoid does it all for me.
My made to order Robotic mistress
with her luscious made to order kisses.
What flesh and blood girl can compare
with her Barbie curves and her platinum hair?
Tired and sore at the end of the day?
She skillfully rubs my cares away.
When I am in an amorous vein.
My Geminoid is always game.
She's merely average as a cook,
-a minor defect in my book.
My Geminoid treats me like a King
and never nags me for a ring.
Single since the court's decree
I know love bears no guarantee.
With a Geminoid, no need to chance
The vagaries of true romance.
Yet I would still set my Barbie free
If my Zelda would come back to me.

John F. McCullagh
Portrait On Cottonwood

My model is a comely lass whose husband has commissioned me. Her cheeks are flushed with natural blush, her half smile not quite matronly. This dress is low cut to reveal the rise and falling of her breasts. Lisa has sat for me before (which allows some familiarity.) This portrait will adorn her home and celebrates her second child. I could suggest some jest of mine was the cause that made her smile, but my medium is the truth and rank deceit is not my style. My brushstrokes capture the last of her youth; A half smile to intrigue mankind.

John F. McCullagh
Prince Liam The Brave

Young Liam loved Orange
and liked to wear ties.
To his firehouse friends
He was one of the guys.

He had his own locker
a slicker and hat.
He also had cancer,
and a bad one at that.

From early on in his life
he fought neuroblastoma;
An invasive tumor
a metastatic carcinoma.

His family who loved him
labored to save
their dear little child
Prince Liam the Brave.

He faced surgery bravely,
engaged in his fight..
He endured radiation,
Chemo and knife.

When many a New Yorker
complains about stress,
Prince Liam was stoic
When put to the test.

Then just before Christmas
he had a relapse
He became neutrapenic-
His immune system collapsed.

With blood in his urine
And a spot on his lung
Liam grew weak.
his defenses undone.
An Amethyst stone
he received from a friend -
his talisman of hope
that he held to the end.

There are brave fire fighters
Who’ll be fighting back tears
Brave Prince Liam has died,
He lived only six years

There are many old people
still avoiding the grave
Who know less about love
Than did Liam the brave

We will gather together
In St Francis’ nave
To remember the life of
Prince Liam the brave

John F. McCullagh
Pro Patria Mori

Pro patria mori

Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.
For generations
we've sold these goods
to young boys
who burn for glory.

Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.
Indeed, how sweet,
Pray tell
Poppy covered warrior.

Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.
How sweet was the Somme?
Such little ground
was gained with
half a generation gone.

Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.
When weapons
far outpace the men
what an empty word
is glory.

John F. McCullagh
Pumpkin Cheese Cake

We were waiting at the trattoria
for our friends to arrive,
when she walked in,
Aphrodite alive.

Her skin, olive brown,
gently kissed by the sun.
A fertility goddess if
there ever was one.

A picture of symmetry
long legs and great hips.
Neapolitan eyes
and, of course, bee strung lips.

Magnificent mammarys,
barely contained
in the briefest of dresses.
as I stared, unashamed.

There, of course, are impediments
I won't try to hide.
The ring on my finger,
My bride at my side.

Plus there's the issue
of fifty years gone.
My Romeo days
have packed and moved on.

Now our friends have arrived
and, chaste kisses exchanged,
We feast on our entrees
as wine glasses are drained.

As dessert time approaches,
I sadly observe
she is not on the menu,
Pumpkin Cheese cake will serve
John F. McCullagh
Q.E.II

Q.E. II

If at first we don't succeed-
still more debt is what we need.
If foreign lands refuse to loan-
To hell with them, we'll print our own

To posterity far down the line
We send the bill for our good time.
To big to fail? Not in the Black?
-Just lean on Bushie and Barrack.

When losses can be socialized
It helps to share the pain.
Banks never were this generous
When asked to share their gains.

Pay for this by printing that
Raise some taxes, pass the hat.
Each minute spend three million more.
Watch the cash fly out the door.

Wall street received their bonuses
The public got the shaft.
They seem contrite in public,
But, behind closed doors, they laugh.

The legal counterfeiter smiles
Hw knows just what to do-
He'll stave off the deflation
by igniting Weimar II.

John F. McCullagh
R.I.P. Bob Sheppard

The 'voice of God 'is silenced-
He's reached this Journey's end.
Now he's with Mel Allen
in Yankee legend land.

Oh we will still hear Sheppard's voice
when we enter at the gate
and he's still announcing Derek
when he steps up to the plate.

But though your fine voice resonates
Through the new park’s hallowed halls
It’s only a faint echo
of what you meant to all.

The old park's walls have fallen
beneath the wrecking ball
and now the legends follow
til' we've nothing left at all.

John F. McCullagh
Rare Beauty

At five foot two in her heels
and being decidedly round
Lori didn't turn many masculine heads
Yet she turned one poor boy's life around.

Forty or more years its been
since we were both seventeen.
I recall it as a difficult year,
Like so many others between.

Cherry cokes at the Blue Bay diner-
She worked on the paper with me.
She rolled up her skirt like the others
to show off her catholic girl knees.

With Greg as her steady companion
she was the heart of our group.
They provided a fair bit of drama
in the happiest days of my youth.

For I was an ungainly kid,
nonathletic, built close to the ground.
It was Lori who made social circles
large enough to include me in bounds

We always were friends, never lovers,
ever shared one passionate kiss
She taught me that mercy trumps justice
She made circles just like God must make his.

Let other Bards praise the great beauties
They're easy to spot in this town.
My muse was a girl short and homely.
Such a beauty is rare to be found.

John F. McCullagh
Re: Your Poetic License Renewal Application

It has come to our attention that your License was suspended-for failing to stop, within lines, for needed punctuation. Your casual allusions to things and times of yore
Are confusing to the reader and frankly mark you as a bore. Your long winded analogies sometimes beggar all belief,
though some here think that your intent is comical relief.
All attempts at alliteration have been something of a dud;
You fall in love with the technique and sound like Elmer Fudd.
Your recent "Ode to Flatulence" in its use of onomatopoeia
was but the latest instance of your verbal diarrhea.
Your metaphors are pitiful and this committee looks askance
at your evident confusion of mere lust with true romance.
Still, we are both kind and merciful (as bureaucrats tend to be),
So we'll renew you for another year upon remittance of the fee.

John F. McCullagh
Real American

November, Sixty-Seven, at the X ray landing zone
men of the seventh Calvary were outnumbered far from home..
The casualties were mounting, Charlie held the heights.
Four massed assaults repulsed that day, Terror ruled the nights
In the high grass and the heat they lay,
the wounded men and dying.
They thought their fate was set and sealed: No med-e vacs were flying.
Through shot and shell, into that hell, two brave men came flying
into the hot landing zone for the wounded men and dying.
Thirteen trips in all they made to keep some hope alive.
There are men alive today who, without them, would have died.
Ed Freeman and Bruce Crandall flew where angels feared to tread.
They bore the wounds of valor where others would have fled.
His medal of Honor was bestowed for conspicuous gallantry.
today we mourn, Ed Freeman’s gone
and Freedom’s still not free.

John F. McCullagh
Red Ceramic Poppy

Imagine yourself a red ceramic Poppy, placed with care into the English soil.
One hundred years ago you were a soldier, a frightened teen in a chaotic world.
You'd been sent, by King's command, into the battle-
A mindless melee John French thought he'd won.
Perhaps some yards of France had been reclaimed at a mind numbing cost of mothers' sons.
You were one of those shot, gassed or burned.
Hit by a shell and blown to kingdom come.
(In 'fourteen they had funerals for the fallen.
Mass burials became the norm before Verdun.)
That's how you went from the playing fields of Eton to an unmarked grave somewhere in Northern France.
So now you are a red ceramic poppy, a symbol of an Empire, now passed.
Placed in English soil by teenaged hands.
one of nine hundred thousand home at last.

John F. McCullagh
Red Streak

It was a dry, sunny day in June.
that fact she would never forget.
It was the day she lost her partner
to a surfeit of regret.

She had taken their little daughter,
the product of donated sperm,
to the nearby Hillside Park
and picnic'd on the side of a berm.

Jane had declined to come with them.
Jane was in one of her 'moods'.
Perhaps she shouldn't have left her,
but she thought Jane just needed to brood.

Jane was her beautiful partner
erratic, mercurial, bright.
Jane, who could light up the heavens
like a bolt from the blue in the night.

They returned to a silent apartment.
It was the stuff of nightmares, not dreams.
A red streak of blood in the bathroom
Her little girl started to scream.

A kind neighbor cared for her daughter
as she spoke to police in a fog.
The M.E.’s van came for the body.
Seeing Jane lifeless was odd.

Tomorrow, she must make arrangements.
She needn't bear this all alone.
It was time that she spoke with Jane's parents.
Softly weeping, she picked up the phone.

John F. McCullagh
Red White And True

A steady gentle rain had fallen throughout the night before.  
Morning dawned, grey and dreary, like the butternut they wore.  
A.P. Hill was on the march, speeding towards the sound,  
the distant sounds of battle, as they marched through Frederick town.

The rebel brain trust harbored hopes that Maryland might secede.  
That a hero's welcome waited for Lee riding in the lead.  
But no, the streets were silent, most folks hid inside their homes.  
They cheered instead, the boys in blue and cheered for them alone.

The rebels marched down Patrick Street as they sped through Frederick Town.  
Then General Hill spied the Stars and Stripes and ordered them struck down.  
It was Mary Quantrell who showed the flag, in defiance of the troops.  
(Whittier misidentified his heroine in hoops.)

It was Mary, all defiant, who displayed our nation's flag;  
a brave matron of thirty years, no ninety year old hag.  
"You may kill me if you must; my life is hardly charmed,  
But I will die before I see this banner come to harm."

Her warning gave the general pause, perhaps in part because.  
He had himself once sworn to protect that banner and that cause.  
He countermanded, then and there, the order that he gave.  
He pressed on to Antietam where the hard pressed Lee was saved.

Mary has no monument, these days, in Frederick town;  
No mention on her grave stone how she faced a General down.  
There's no honor in her hometown for this heroine with pluck.  
That Barbara Fritchie legend? - Just some poet run amuck.

John F. McCullagh
Redemption

He thought that he would die alone
when he entered hospice care.
Folks wind up in Calvary
who haven’t got a prayer.

Long estranged from his first wife
And the two children that she bore him.
He only sought a refuge
from pain and death before him.

The nurse on duty saw his name
And hope combined with fear.
Could this be her father that was lost?
Could fate have brought him here?

She asked the patient if he had
some family about.
He mentioned his two daughters’ names
“-but they must be grown up now.”

“I’m Wanda, I’m your daughter.”
She said, choking back her tears.
He begged for her forgiveness
For being gone for all those years.

Of course he’d missed her wedding day
and never held her child.
He’d missed so many Father’s Days.
Still, she made him proud.

Perhaps it was a twist of fate
Perhaps the Angels’ plan
That when this man had breathed his last
He held his daughter’s hand.
.

The story of the reunion of Wanda Rodriquez, hospice nurse with her estranged
father, Victor Peraza, at Calvary Hospital in the Bronx.

John F. McCullagh
Reflections On A Wall

They are forever here together, they shared a common fate. Here are they, the first to fall, and those who perished late. Some were slaughtered at Khe San, Others died at Hue. All came home through Dover, buried in their native clay. They are our older brothers who fought as brave Marines. There are sons and fathers here and far too many teens. Fifty Eight thousand names inscribed in ebony writ bold. Time passes and the memories fade; their stories go untold. I see my grey reflection as my fingers touch the wall Across the years I think of one, so young, who gave his all.

John F. McCullagh
Rejoice, We Conquer

They sent a man from Marathon
To tell the Greeks the News:
That Darius’ army had been smashed
His plans for conquest ruined.

Pheidippides, the runner,
in full battle armor dressed,
rang all the way from Marathon
to Athens’s temple steps.

The city elders waited there,
Fearing tidings grim.
He said: “Rejoice, we Conquer”
It took the last of him.

These days we don’t give battle
With an army at the shore
Our enemy is cancer
Hear our army roar.

We’re marching twenty miles a day
To put that tyrant down
To hear: “Rejoice, we Conquer! ”
would be the sweetest sound.

John F. McCullagh
Remember

The old man sat in his motorized chair
in a room filled with shadow and light.
His bored health attendant cared for him there
as he made his descent into night.
He longed to remember the smell of her hair,
His Muse who had brought him such pleasure.
To escape, for a moment, the dull aching pain
Of the cancer that was taking his measure.
He longed to return to that day long ago,
They made love in the warm summer rain.
Yet how could he summon the Muse of his youth
When he couldn’t remember her name?
Would his kindly Physician take pity on him-
the old man in his motorized chair?
Would he increase the drip until his heart stilled?
When he died would she be with him there?
He had failed to appreciate, when young and strong,
the pitiless tempo of Time.
He couldn’t remember the words of their song,
to descant at the end of the line.

John F. McCullagh
Remember November

Remember, Remember to vote in November
put all the incumbents to rout.
I know of no reason
their fiscal near treason
Ought ever to be forgot.

To murder the dollar
(or at least make it holler)
Just keep spending more - don't relax
The party is over, we're not sitting in clover
We'll be up to our eyeballs in tax

John F. McCullagh
Remmbering Guernica

I have observed that history rhymes,
with no exact repeats each time.
As foreign nationals flock to fight
For ISIS and the Caliphate.
It seems I've heard this tune before
When socialists fought in the
Spanish war.
That dress rehearsal for World War Two
That played out on the Iberian plains.
Then Communists and Fascists fought
and idealists were slaughtered for their dreams.
Now in the village of Kobane
Its U.S. drones, not Nazi Planes,
The Kurds expel the men in black
Who leave behind their friends remains.
Foreign fighters by the score
won't need their passports anymore.
They fought against America,
Is this a second Guernica?

John F. McCullagh
Repetoire

There are songs that I no longer play, even when I’m at practice alone. The words are to painful to sing now that I’ve reaped what I’ve sown.

There are places that we used to go, where I haven’t gone in a year. The barkeep must think that I’ve died, As I no longer stop for a beer.

There are friends that I no longer see- They would only remind me of you. Phantom pains to an old amputee Bitter leaves from my garden of rue.

There are songs that I no longer play, Whose lyrics would stab at my heart. These days, I’ve been drinking for two. It’s my solace since we’ve been apart.

John F. McCullagh
Requiem For A Queen

This Queen Anne was built long ago,
in a progressive age.
The man who built her passed away
before Hitler took the stage.
His aged granddaughter had it last.
until it was her time.
A conservator has sold the estate
to a builder with designs.

The house is a time capsule
of America before the Wars.
The craftsmanship exquisite;
You can't find this anymore.
Generations lived and loved
within these sturdy walls.
But now this house is empty
and awaits the wrecking ball.

I've been asked by some historians
of our society in Queens.
To photograph this lovely home
before it passes from the scene.
They'll build a row, with common brick,
attached two families.
They'll destroy this house without a trace
And cut down all the trees.
The plan is surely profitable
but, to my mind, obscene.

When we erase our treasured past,
Naught remains to call to mind
The greatness that we once possessed
and might reclaim in time.

John F. McCullagh
Resurrection Of Moshe Gimp

The Einsatzgrupen rounded up the Juden of SWIEBODZIN. They first led out the men and boys. The younger children crying. The Germans forced us to disrobe, I saw my Father naked. We faced a pit dug in the ground then began the murder.

My father pushed me to the ground as machine gun fire raked the line. I found myself beneath the pile of the bleeding, dead and dying. A single gunshot here and there They finished all who moved. But I played dead convincingly My Dad would have approved. When the Germans tossed in lime and dirt I didn’t make a sound. There was air, foul, but fit to breathe, beneath the earthen mound. I listened till I could be sure The assassins all had gone. I struggled up toward the light past the bleeding, dead and gone. Once clear I raced towards the woods to find a place to hide. By grace of G-d, a righteous man For pity, took my side. With fake name and faked papers I made it through alive. Now I am here, Moshe Gimp To speak for all who died

John F. McCullagh
Rethink Impossible

Those lovely folks at N.S.A. love reading your e-mails.
They parse each line in search of crime; the devil’s in the details.
Those Patriots at A T & T are equal to the task
of providing them with access; they’ll do anything they’re asked.
They spy upon the great and small, the poets and the dreamers,
to catch a whiff of nasty plots now being hatched by schemers.
They’ve spied upon Sarkozy and they’ve eavesdropped in on Merkel.
They tapped lines in the U.N. and other diplomatic circles.
Their corporation cronies provide them with full access for no fee;
This makes our spies the envy of the Russian KGB
So when you reach out and touch someone, don’t assume you are alone.
I’m pretty sure big brother is there listening on the phone.

John F. McCullagh
Rivals

From long time friends to bitter foes
From boon companions to friends estranged
The cute little redhead accomplished that
but it was nothing she'd prearranged
So delicate, so beautiful
with eyes a deep Aegean blue
Of course I made a play for her
She wasn't going home with you
Yes, her kisses were as sweet
as you imagined they must be
The reality was better still
warming an autumn evenings chill
I was the first to take the risk
that's why I was the one she kissed
My actions weren’t the least bit shady
but faint hearts never win fair Ladies

John F. McCullagh
Robert Emmet

“Let no man write my epitaph.”
The defiant rebel said.
'Let no woman eulogize me
After I am dead.'

'I give my life for Ireland-
An Ireland strong and free
An Ireland that's united,
One free of tyranny.'

'When my country takes its rightful place
Among nations of the world.
That day I will not live to see
When our banner is unfurled.'

'On that day, and only then
Let my suffering be recalled-
and that I died for Liberty-
The sweetest death of all.'

John F. McCullagh
On a hot August night
She appeared, the lost soul.
The sweltering evening
turning suddenly cold.
She was dressed in the clothes
She had worn when she died.
A bullet hole in her temple,
a handgun by her side.
A beautiful Stranger
at the foot of my bed.
A faint smell of lilac
from a specter long dead.
The Ghost didn’t speak,
At least not that I heard,
Nor could I, gripped by terror,
Utter one word.
World weary and sad
said her facial expression.
A Love gone all wrong
was my honest impression.
Then she was gone;
Not a glimmer remained.
The warm summer evening
My stateroom reclaimed.
It was cold where she died
On the steps to the beach;
Her spirit is restless
and seems never to sleep.

Oh beautiful stranger
None can say why you died
But the coroner ruled
That it was suicide.

John F. McCullagh
Rosamund De Clifford

O’ let us lay together love
when this World’s cares are past.
My Queen I have had locked away
She was treacherous to the last.
Accept this rose I’ve named for you,
A heirloom hybrid bloom.
I’ll have them carve its like in stone
Upon our honored tomb
So that, my Love, in years to come,
Our children’s children see
How I loved my Rosamund,
How much you’ve meant to me

John F. McCullagh
Rose Without A Thorn

As he watched her walk away,
fading quickly in the dark.
He fought back a sob, a tear,
as he nursed his damaged heart.
She had made her choice at last
and brought an end to their affair.
A universe of might- have- beens
vanished on that cold night's air.
How bleak his future looked right then
for she would not dwell there.
Triangles are difficult
and swans belong in pairs.
His children he saw in her eyes
now never would be born.
He would find another Lover
but never Rose without a thorn.

John F. McCullagh
Rumpelstiltskin's Revenge

Rumpelstiltskin’s Revenge

A worthless scrap of linen
On which Ben Franklin’s printed
Can buy you one tenth ounce of gold
An eagle freshly minted.

Our Quantitative Easing
Has made Rumpelstiltskin sore
Our turning paper into gold
Means there’s no need for straw

As far as barbarous relics go
Gold Eagles are quite nice
But as gold doesn’t grow on trees
They’ll have to raise the price.

John F. McCullagh
Sacred Honor

Hands trembled but their hearts did not
On that Independence Day.

When they signed the Declaration
Many signed their lives away.

Some signers died in prison
Or sank in poverty.

Several closed their eyes on life
Before final victory.

One man, Clark, of New Jersey
Deserves a special nod.

He suffered much for Liberty
At the hands of Howe and God.

His two sons were imprisoned,
Floating on the New York tide.

Deprived of food and water
What could they do but die.

The British were true devils
And said they'd be set free.

If their father would come out for King
And recant Libery.

If he betrayed his sacred trust
He might well save his sons.

If he recanted they'd be free-
What would you have done?

His answer echoes down through time,
Their proposal he denied.
Our document was signed in blood and thrones must be defied.

John F. McCullagh
At Calvary three crosses stand,
where the rebel, Jesus, died.
With him, two petty criminals-
were also crucified.

Per legend, one man begged relief
sought pardon as he died.
The other merely mocked the Lord,
as they hung side by side.

The first rebuked the second man:
No fear of God, you slime?
We both bear the same sentence-
just judgment for our crime.”

But this man who did nothing wrong
with us is crucified.
The dogs will get my body
But not my heart and mind”

Jesus then forgave them both
Upon his Dad’s advice
For no one whose been crucified
Should have to suffer twice.

At Calvary three crosses stand
Tenanted no more
Here good edged evil two to one-
for those still keeping score.
John F. McCullagh
Sanctuaire

Le vieux prêtre se tenait à l'autel de Dieu.
Mince et frêle, un peu voûté d'années de labeur,
Il travaillait encore aujourd'hui dans la vigne du Seigneur.
Il était juste un autre jour d'été chaud
dans le pays hedgerow de Normandie.
Il disait la messe pour les vieilles femmes et des vieillards.

Même alors qu'il se préparait à dire les paroles de la consécration
La violence et le mal sont entrés dans ce sanctuaire.
Le vieux prêtre leva les yeux dans les yeux,
noir avec la haine, du soldat de l'adolescence d'ISIS.
Alors seulement, il remarqua le mouvement de la lame.
'Toujours la croix avant la couronne.' Murmura-t,
Comme il est mort obéissant à la parole de son Maître

John F. McCullagh
Sanctuary

The Bells of Notre Dame called out “Come fill my Center Hall”
“Come Catholic, Muslim, Hindu and Jew; Come with no faith at all”
The Mothers of the Murdered came, united in their grief.
For bullets and I.E.D’s cannot sort us by belief.
One woman in a hijab had come here from Verdun.
Like the Protestant beside her, She had lost her only son.
Both were strangers to this place, Unfamiliar with the prayers
But, having no place else to go; They found some comfort there.
The Highborn and the famous came with those of low estate
Some came here to find peace of Soul; to put an end to hate.
Some sought shelter from the world; to find sanctuary.
But the figure on the Cross proclaims we all face Calvary.
We all face the same sentence; all perish in the end.
We know this evil must be stopped but know not how or when.
The Bells of Notre Dame call out
“Let us begin again.”

John F. McCullagh
Sargasso Sea

It is bounded by the gyre, this sea without a shore.
It once was but a sea of weeds but now there is much more.
Here are plastic bags and cups discarded thoughtlessly.
Refuse from our teeming shores comes here eventually.

In another time and place these waters were deep blue
crystal clean and beautiful as when first Columbus viewed.
Dappled sunshine lit these waves in this sea without a shore
but now it is a garbage dump (as if we needed more.)

The plastic and the Styrofoam are scarcely changed by time.
they'll still be drifting in the sea when breath is no longer mine.
The salt sting of my bootless tears I've add to the sea,
for all the creatures great and small who drown in Man's debris.

John F. McCullagh
Scars

Somewhere, deep inside of me, are all the scars you cannot see. These wounds run deep though sight unseen; Loved ones lost for whom I keen. I'm a survivor, it's been said. I've outlived parents, Lovers and friends. I've grieved, despaired, all to no end- for-with each loss it begins again. The price of letting myself feel? These unseen scars that never heal.

I 'm tossed upon an unseen storm, like a mariner on the deep, Roiled in the trough between the waves; I wake with a start feeling wane and weak.

I bear my unseen scars with pride and will until my turn to fall For he who never bore such scars is he who never loved at all.

John F. McCullagh
Screamplay

Remakes of old foreign films
Frankly fail to thrill.
Comedies are too predictable,
mistaking flatulence for skill.
It's time to think outside the box.
Turn a genre on its head.
I'm working on a thriller
About folks haunted by one dead.
They must learn the ghost's identity;
He'll spook them til they do.
The working title of my screenplay?
I'm calling it "Boo-Who?"

John F. McCullagh
Secret Smile

I know that I'm not perfect
that sometimes I'm much less-
But love can make our future
much better than our past.

I think sometimes that you forget
How beautiful you are.
You see yourself a bit player
where I see you, the star.

I wish that you could see yourself
in the mirror of my eyes.
So that when I'm just a memory
You'd still have cause to smile.

The miles between us can't erase
my heartfelt love of you.
That's why when no one else can see
You'd catch me smiling too.

John F. McCullagh
Section J Row 4 Grave 25

Memorial Day, 1945

With aching knees he climbed the steps
That ringed the bandstand round.
The Living sat on folding chairs
on consecrated ground.

The general turned and faced the dead,
His back was to the living.
He told his boys, dead heroes all,
He hoped they'd be forgiving.

The fight was hard at Anzio
The foe ringed them around.
Through desperate days in mad forays
They paid with blood for ground.

The cost proved high, so many dead
Still others maimed for life.
It is not sweet or glorious
to die in pain and strife..

If his mistakes had caused their deaths
He hoped they would forgive.
For only men prepared to die
Are men prepared to live.

And if some fool should ever speak
Of glorious death in battle
He'd set them straight, at any rate,
About such stupid prattle..

Jack Toffey in his coffin lies
Among eight Thousand others.
White Crosses mark the resting place
of Jack and all his brothers.
This is based on an actual Memorial Day speech given by General Lucian Truscott at the Nettino Military cemetery a few weeks after the victory in Europe. He served under General Mark Clark and commanded the salient at Anzio. Lt. Col. John J. Toffey Jr, twice winner of the Silver Star, died in the fighting at the town of Palestrina, Italy, which is famous for its roses.

John F. McCullagh
Semper Fi

(Note: This poem is a fictional re-imagining of the poem 'Mother' written by Padraig Pearse the night before his execution in 1916. It has a changed point of view and had been moved to Afghanistan, 2009. I apologize to all who misconstrued this to be about the death of a specific marine lance corporal)

This loss is very hard upon his mother:
To endure first his birth and then his death.
The time between -scarcely a generation
But in that short span of time he proved his worth.

They are too few, the proud who wear the emblem,
And fight our countries battles in our stead.
Where they found him, his position was surrounded
By the bleeding bodies of Jihadist dead.

Enroll his name among our Countries’ heroes
Remember him for all of time to come,
But put away the medal they awarded-
I need no medal to recall my son.

My brave strong son who first fought in Fallujah,
and battled militants in Kandahar.
He joined the fallen as his tour was ending
Now all that we have left is a gold star.

But in the long nights that are surely coming
I will speak his name within my heart.
I will take certain comfort in the knowledge
That our son was faithful and he fought.

John F. McCullagh
Seven Days

It is, for some, a brief vacation from the world of work for pay. For a child awaiting Christmas it seems an eternity. For a patient sent to hospice, their prognosis being bleak, The sum of their tomorrows may amount to just one week.

For them there will be opiates to help manage their pain All chemotherapy will stop, for it has been in vain. Like vandals bent on pillage, Cancer cells their havoc wreak. Fear yields now to acceptance in the sure knowledge of defeat.

We all face this same sentence, this same curtain call awaits; though some may drift off during sleep, which seems a kinder fate. Appreciate the time you have and give each day its due. We once had all the world and time but now our days are few.

In memory of my friend and colleague, Stephanie Cilla

John F. McCullagh
Sex And The California Co-Ed

Yes means Yes, and No means No
It has not been forever so.
Once Yes meant Yes and No meant Maybe
(But that oft resulted in a baby.)
If your fling was started in a bar
You're judged a rapist by Cali law.
As guilty, per this legal muddle,
As if a struggle came before the snuggle.
If your date has had one glass
That's an illegal forward pass!
Higher employment I foresee
At the bureau of Sexuality
Before you can couple legally,
File these forms and pay a fee.
Regulatory overkill
assumes young Women lack free will,
Young men are safer watching porn
and curse that Brown was ever born.

John F. McCullagh
Sex Viginti

Some of you I saw in my crib; those brightly colored shapes.  
Who knew how close we would become through words and printed page?  
How clever these twenty six close friends seem to me right now.  
They can answer my every question; be it when, where, why or how.  
Near infinite is thy variety in your mix of shapes and sounds.  
In you every Indo-European language can be found.  
Like a linguistic DNA you take on varied forms  
From age to age you morph, through slang, until you are reborn.  
You are like the Phoenix rising glorious from the ash.  
You are a friend to Every man who journeys to the past.  
You are printed, you are digital, you are spoken on the stage.  
Without you Love itself is mute and blank remains this page.  
You have proven all good friends to me. I hope I’ve served you well.  
(My punctuation is sometimes questionable but I’ve mastered how to spell.)

John F. McCullagh
Shakespeare Replies To Cuthbert Bundy

King James demands a Scottish play
and believes in witches three
Look close and see they are the fates
that set our destiny

I can't write about his mother
or the murder of her clerk
One whisper about Darnley
and we'll all be out of work.

After that unhappy business
about Essex and the Queen.
I won't risk another incident
no abdication scene.

Keep the text, in time to come
it will prove rare like gold
I kept it shorter than King Lear
your attention span to hold.

W.S.

.

John F. McCullagh
She Wished Me Love

I remember, when I was young,
Gloria Lynne and this song she sung,
She sang with perfect pitch:
I wish you Love.”

It was a light Blues serenade,
A song my older sisters played.
As I would sip my Lemonade
She wished me love.

Now that heart of hers,
so full of Love
Has become one
with Him above.
So, with regrets,
As fate abets,
She’s been set free

Yet on a certain day in Spring
If I should chance to hear
a bluebird sing.
I may recall
That, after all,
She wished me Love.

John F. McCullagh
These eyes have seen the fire from the sky
I felt the heat a thousand clicks away
At first no screams, just people turned to shadows
A sunburst touched to earth one fatal day.

These eyes have seen my City turned to ashes
I have heard her women sobbing in despair
I stood alone amidst my city dying
No God above to whom I’d make a prayer..

And now I stand before a Buddhist temple
A different city and a river view.
This city seems most beautiful and vibrant
Hiroshima what has become of you?

The historic statue of Shinran Shonin, founder of the Judo Shinshu school of Buddhism, now stands in front of the New York Buddhist Church on Riverside Drive in New York City. This statue of Shinran Shonin survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, in which 150,000 people died, and 90 percent of the buildings in the city collapsed or burned.

John F. McCullagh
Shots Fired

"Shots Fired." "Officer Down"
The Navy Yard is a killing ground.
High above the Atrium floor,
The first person shooter
wants to run up his score.
I enter the atrium and dive for the wall
as singing death pays my partner a call.
"Officer down, building 197"
He's a lucky one, his Kevlar vest saved him.
I crawl on my belly towards the stairs.
Will he add to his total ere I make it there?
I pass the corpse of a pretty girl,
with a puzzled look upon her face.
A red rose blooms from her white blouse.
Fear flees as anger takes its place.
The swat team enters and exchanges fire.
I make the stairwell and start creeping higher.
I remove my shoes and in stocking feet
I silently climb toward the deadly sounds
I stumble upon a security guard
Who nevermore will make his rounds.
What happened next, I'll always remember
about this deadly dark September.
A deep breath to calm me,
I chambered a round.
Was it my shot that brought
the mad murderer down?
There were many shots fired
That terrible day
As hunter, become hunted,
was brought to bay.

I checked on my partner.
I called my wife.
I am more than happy to get on with life.
The shooter is on the coroner's table.
I write up the incident as best as I'm able.
I left out the part about the girl
Who has gone, we hope, to a better world.
She gave me courage, she banished fear
She is probably the reason that I'm still here.

John F. McCullagh
Sisyphus

The path I tread is difficult, the grade, in places, steep.
Condemned by the gods, I follow it without surcease or sleep.
I push my rock before me like a slave beneath the lash.
My sentence is forever and this is my fated task.

My hands are callused from hard work maneuvering the stone.
I do my work in silence; my thoughts are still my own.
The gods will not hear me complain as I struggle to gain traction.
I am not weak and will not give those bastards satisfaction.

The stone moves as my muscles strain to roll it towards the height
The stars are very beautiful and I’m working by their light.
At last the apex is achieved, a feat of strength and will.
Once more I hear Dis snickering as the stone rolls down the hill.

I take a breath to clear my lungs and then proceed below.
My stone waits on me patiently for yet another go.
Well, I am game if you are game-my unspoken reply.
We resume our pas- de- deux beneath the cold uncaring sky

John F. McCullagh
Sixty One

The season is a marathon and that one, more than most. The travel was exhausting with two trips out to the coast. Mickey was the favored son to wear Ruth’s home run Crown But a bloody abscess in his thigh had taken Mantle down.

Roger Maris was exhausted if the truth were to be told. He raced Ruth’s ghost all summer; now the air was turning cold. With the Mick down with an injury, the tension only grew, as the calendar turned another page and at bats dwindled too.

No pitcher wished to be the one to yield that needed hit, even if it would be marked down with an asterisk. The count ran two and “OH’ with Barber in the catbird seat Tracy Stallard toed the rubber as the catcher called for heat.

Some moments are forever, though, sadly, far too few. Roger turned upon the ball; towards right field it flew. It landed in the lower deck as Roger rounded third It proved to be the winning run as the Yankees blanked the Birds.

I have the photo on my wall as Roger dropped the bat; the consummate professional, no showboating or act. He defined grace under pressure; he showed what must be done.

The shadows reach out towards the mound when you hit Sixty-One.

John F. McCullagh
Skin In The Game

The old man's skin was parchment thin,
his eyes a watery blue.
On his left arm he bore the mark;
his Birkenau tattoo.

The letter 'B' and six numbers
would be with him to the grave.
A permanent reminder
of his time as Hitler's slave.

Two winters spent in Auschwitz-
What God would so design?
It left him gaunt and starving
with no faith in the Divine.

Yet he survived the worst and lived
when all his bunkmates died.
His first wife was dust on the wind
as was their little child.

Now his grandson bears that mark,
the one and very same.
To remind the world Of Hitler's crimes,
He has skin in the game.

John F. McCullagh
Slouching Towards Wiemar

Your impulses are generous, kind and pure-
But impose costs on us we cannot endure.
One point three trillion spent each year, tis said,
to keep our current poor in their own beds.
Americans face debt related worries
While social engineers break out new Mores.
Recent Grads despair of their careers
and student loans are going in arrears.
Priests, Teachers and the Boy Scouts, rank and file,
Apparently are staffed with pedophiles.
Socialism's great and life is sunny-
until you run out of other people's money.

John F. McCullagh
The snow was blowing among the trees. In large wet flakes it tumbled down. My captain turned, as if to speak, but from his lips there came no sound. A red rose bloomed there on his chest -staining dark the Wehrmacht grey. I looked in horror as he pitched face forward to the ground. "Sniper" I yelled and ducked for cover. The copse of trees echoed the sound.

Somewhere out there he awaits; the Devil's son, the cunning foe. He's stalked our party for three days yet leaves no footprints in the snow. I served in France in Forty -one; before these Russians were our foes. I shiver but it's not from fear; it's just that we lack winter clothes. I motion briskly with my right hand, I think the shooter must be there my corporal nods and starts to move; perhaps he can outflank this man.

My soul is black for I've done some things; for which I once would have been ashamed. I saw the Jewess try to shield her babe as I placed them in a common grave.

This man out there, a warrior; he risks his life upon command. He is clever, this one, he waits his chance. Either its him or me that's dammed. The drifting snowflakes hide his breath. But He's still out there this I know.

My Captain lies still upon the earth and is slowly covered by the snow.

We are soldiers who risk our lives. We sacrifice for the Fatherland. We dream of a woman and a warm bed Never of Death's cold clammy hand

My men cry out, the fox is flushed The sniper has at last been found.

It's true what they say of the bullet that kills you; I never even heard the sound.
Soliloquy Of The First Time Buyer

To buy, or not to buy: That is the Question.

Whether it is better in the end to suffer

The moods and whims of some outrageous landlord

Or take A.R.M.S. against your future earnings

And end up owning something? In hock, for years;

Pay rent? And by paying rent to say we end

The heart ache and the thousand natural shocks

Home ownership is heir to. Reduced Consumption?

No Politician’s wish! To rent? To lease?

To lease, perchance to own? Ay, that’s a thought

For in the grip of debt you’re paying bills

Till you have shuffled off this mortal coil

It gives one pause. That’s the aspect

That makes calamity of adjusting rates

For who would bear the years and years of debt

Fine dining now reduced to happy meals,

Buyers remorse, and the long delays.

The Questionable title and the risk
Your credit rating doesn’t rate the loan.

When you yourself know if you lose your job

You’ll end up sleeping in your S.U.V.

To grunt and sweat under a heavy load

Under the threat of something worse than debt

The forced short sale, from which, once closed

No equity returns. It puzzles the will.

And makes us rather bear such debts we have

And, if necessary, refinance them still.

Compounding thus make cowards of us all.

And so our youthful promise and ambition

Is hobbled by the weight of student loans

made by lenders judged too big to fail.

In this regard the risk is very real

We lose the house to auction.

(a parody of Hamlet Act 3, Scene one)  A shameless rip off of William Shakespeare by John F. McCullagh
Solstice

Solstice stirs my Druid roots.  
Those roots entangle with my dreams.  
A language, strange and musical,  
celebrates the world unseen.

The druids issue from the grove,  
solemn in their robes of white.  
The doors of time are open wide  
on this, the long year's shortest night.

Ovates divine and bards will speak,  
Singing in the Cambric tongue.  
The Druid raises arms on high  
to praise the power of the Sun.

She lies upon the altar stone.  
The victim of the gods' caprice  
Sunlight pours between the stones  
where blood was shed and breath has ceased.

John F. McCullagh
Somebody Knows

It goes back forty summers to a hot August night.  
This cold case I'm working with no end in sight.  
The girl, Leslie Zaret, was last seen alive  
At the Pioneer tavern, she was standing outside.  
Main Street runs North- South on Queensboro Hill.  
She was ten blocks from home on that night she was killed.  

She accepted a ride- was it someone she knew?  

A Janitor found her- cold naked and dead  
In a schoolyard in Bayside, the old reports said.  
She was raped with a hairbrush, no semen was found.  
The girl had been strangled, but hadn't been bound..  

If the killer was male- was he impotent too?  

The victim was pretty, with long Brunette hair.  
She never came home and her parents despaired.  
My cops cleared the boyfriend, her ex- boyfriend too.  
Still we always believed it was someone she knew.  
She attended  John Bowne, a high school nearby.  

Was the killer a classmate? She was too young to die.  

Her class graduated, now grown old and gray.  
Most stayed in town although some moved away.  
Some have passed on and are taking their rest  
But none died liked Leslie with her neck tightly pressed.  
People will talk, surely some must suspect  
I think someone knows something  
about poor Leslie's death.  
Please come forth from the shadows, help me solve this crime.  

Leslie's waited for justice for a very long time.  

John F. McCullagh
Songs Without Words

When they brought him to the Hospital

He was listed as John Doe.

He would have liked the irony-
as Harry Chapin was well known.

His hair was like a lion’s mane
His face both kind and strong

Though doctor’s tried and nurses cried
Harry had sung his last song.

Like Wednesdays’ child with far to go,
He’d been on the road that day.

He was scheduled for a concert
For which he’d take no pay.

He sang songs for the suppers
of the poor and the deprived.

He may not have been “Religious”
-but he lived life sanctified-
His car was observed slowing down
And weaving between lanes
He might even have been dying then
of Coronary pains.

The trucker behind him could not stop
He rode the brakes in vain.
The truck smashed into Harry’s car
which promptly burst in flames.

The Trucker and a Motorist
dragged Harry from the flames.
I’d dearly love to thank them both
But I don’t know their names.

They Med-evacuated him
A helicopter came.
They brought Him to Nassau County Med-
reporting “John Doe” as his name.

On that torrid summer day,
Without a breath of air,
There would not be an encore
That much, at least, was clear.

Harry’s eyes were glazing over,
It was certain he had passed.
I hope he had a peaceful end
when his Corey came at last.

(A tribute to Harry Foster Chapin: Singer, Songwriter and Philanthropist. 12/07/42-07/16/81)

John F. McCullagh
I never have met you, Sophia, 
but we talk everyday on the phone. 
Your voice has the sweetness of honey 
tasted fresh come from the comb. 

With cadence and timbre seductive 
The sirens' call comes from your lips. 
It has the effect on male members 
as the sway of a pretty girls' hips. 

A beautiful Greek from the Islands 
skin kissed by the sun, I suppose. 
Or maybe you're fat and your fifty 
and wearing a Mu Mu- who knows? 

I prefer to surmise you're a beauty. 
with velvet smooth skin and brown eyes. 
A girl with a voice of an angel 
like Michaelangelo would devise. 

John F. McCullagh
I knocked three times upon the door and said the magic words.
The door opened and I entered, careful not to be observed.
There were couples sipping sodas, there were singles at the bar.
They were slurping Coca Cola in defiance of the law.
There were girls, dancing half naked, as the piano player played.
If their moms were here to see this they would surely be dismayed.
Dr. Pepper, flowing freely, was the special of the day
There was Pepsi, with real sugar, smuggled in from Monterrey.
“If you want it, I can get it.” John at the bar opined.
“If you’re jonesing for a ginger ale that too can be supplied.”
That was when I showed my badge, , and the smile ran from his face.
My Men in Blue broke down the door; Arrests were taking place.
The patrons screamed and tried to flee-but that’s all right with me.
Tomorrow dawns with one less den filled with iniquity.

John F. McCullagh
Sperm Bandk Lawsuit

There is sperm for sale and wombs for rent
For same sex couples it’s cash well spent.
While heterosexuals breed their own
Gay couples, as yet, cannot clone.
A lesbian couple who had the itch
is suing their sperm bank for 'bait and switch'.
They wanted a Caucasian baby
and had requested sperm from vial '380'.
The donor of that sperm was white,
Handsome, smart, just 'not their type'
They were given another's sperm instead
And an interracial child was bred.
It seems they were given vial '330'
The vials, it seems, were marked unclearly.
An honest mistake by a nearsighted boomer? -
or one with a twisted sense of humor?
A civil suit will go to trial
seeking damages for a mixed race child.
If their motion to dismiss should meet denial
The 'bank' will suffer premature withdrawal.
In which event bankruptcy looms
For the bank that supplies the sperm for wombs.

John F. McCullagh
Spice Girl

Bland and ordinary will not do,
They’re much too dull for the likes of you.
Plain Vanilla makes you snooze,
even chocolate is yesterdays news.
You’re a bit of a nut, Meg, it appears,
a bit hung over from ginger beers.
Your racks ’well stocked with exotic favors.
Cinnamon stick your favorite flavor.
Clove and garlic, Tarragon too
You’re a saucy wench, and tasty true.
But of all the spices on your shelf
I first reach for you, yourself.

John F. McCullagh
Stage Fright

I’ll admit that it was different, and something of a strain
When our troupe was performing “Hamlet: for the criminally insane.
It was some do gooder’s notion to expose them to the arts.
and I saw that they accepted it when boys played women’s parts.
Some Prisoners thought the ghost was real and they were sore afraid
Their minds could not distinguish it was just a role I played.
Each line meant to gain a laugh fell silent with that group,
But as the death toll mounted, they thought that was a hoot.
They were the strangest audience, those prisoners out there
When Hamlet mused on suicide, they’d hoped he’d end it there.
Poison, murder, suicide; they were thoroughly entertained!
To thunderous applause we bore Prince Hamlet from the stage.
The warden was so gratified the Bard was loved by all
That we’re performing Titus Andronicus for the prisoners this Fall.

John F. McCullagh
In fiery furnace I was cast,  
spewn forth in a Nova’s blast.  
I traveled interstellar space  
before I had a name or face.

Dust coalesced around a star,  
and gathered in a rocky disk.  
I spent a billion years a stone  
Before I called the sea my own

Then I was an Ancient bird  
Who soared above the chalky Cliffs  
That was timeless time ago  
just before the comet hit.

In course of time I was begotten  
An heir to all time has forgotten  
A higher consciousness I claim  
At least I have a face and name.

As stardust we should raise our eyes  
In wonder at the starry skies  
Where stellar furnaces brightly burn  
and other stardust wait their turn.

And when I should depart from here  
Do not mourn or shed a tear  
For I am stardust- never fear  
I am the music of this sphere.

John F. McCullagh
Stars

I heard the verdict he pronounced in utter fear and dread.
Half of those with my condition within a year are dead.
I must not yield, must not give up, I have a life to save.
And yet I feel this chill like someone walking on my grave.
Grant me the grace to make my fight but don't let me pretend.
That failure is impossible right to the bitter end.
I'll need the help of my good friends If I am to survive.
I think of all I've loved the best; were all my choices wise?
If they but love as I have loved I cannot be undone
They will stand by me at least until my race is run.
They are like the stars for constancy, who, although unseen at times.,
in the dark night of the soul is when they brightest shine,

John F. McCullagh
The bachelor and the spinster
stood together, hand in hand,
before the Priest who’d wed them
in the chapel Kilmainham.

With two prison guards as witnesses
there in Kilmainham gaol,
Joseph Plunkett and Grace Clifford
wed at midnight goes the tale.

At dawn a firing squad awaited
her brave bold Fenian man.
She’d remember their one, stolen, kiss
and the ring placed on her hand.

Her Joseph chose a dark way home
when he tweaked the lion’s tail.
In martyrdom he found a way
to rouse the sons of Gael.

Some marriages last many years,
some, a shorter time-
but a love that lasts a lifetime
is truly hard to find.

Joseph, knowing what he was to lose
His love and fate embraced.
He died when bullets pierced his heart
while in a state of grace.

John F. McCullagh
State Of The Union

When the President “served” in the Senate
He was mostly an absentee tenant.
So I don’t find it odd he’s campaigning for “God”
while our Country is stuck in the toilet.

In the Senate a fellow named Baucus
Believes it’s a one party Caucus
No G.O.P. need apply, this fellow is sly
Nearly nine hundred Billion he’ll cost us.

In the House we’ve got Reid and Pelosi
So I’m viewing our future morosely
If the “tea party” crew doesn’t give them the shoe
“free” health care will likely prove costly.

When I look at our unfunded debt, I wonder how bad it will get.
Will the whole thing implode?
Will our prince prove a toad?
Las Vegas is now taking bets.

John F. McCullagh
Barrack's on vacation, playing golf by the sea,
but life keeps interrupting and wasting greens fees
Iraq is in flames and the country may fall,
Barrack steps calmly up and addresses his ball.
While ISIS is murdering Kurds by the bunch
Barrack's on vacation and ordering lunch.
Israel is in trouble as Hamas wages war.
Barrack limits arms shipments and tallies his score.
Ferguson, Missouri suffers racial unrest,
while Barrack is debating which driver is best.
James Foley is dead, his throat has been cut.
Our President speaks, and then he makes a nice putt.
My colleagues rebuke me. 'Don't beat a dead horse! '
The President's great, he's staying the course.

John F. McCullagh
Stella Andrea Bernadette Miller

Her blood alcohol level was point thirty three
when the trooper pulled over her car.
She had a flat tire and her speaking was slurred
As if she had just drunk a whole Bar.

She was over the limit and half in the bag
So they charged her with a D.U.I.
Yet her case got dismissed and the D.A. was miffed
When she proved she was naturally high.

In seems that some people who munch on French fries
Are host to yeast that is causing them grief, making sure that they never run dry.
For Stella' own body was churning out brew thus explaining her bloodshot red eyes
(and her sad reputation as a cheap date as well as her poor taste in guys.)

Her babes that she nursed never fuzzed or complained
For her breasts they were naturally keen.
Kids back in High School all thought Stella was cool
(She was drunk off her ass as a teen.)

She now must watch carefully what she consumes
when she’s out for a night on the town.
She produces Grey Goose with her own gastric juice
So Pasta remains out of bounds.

John F. McCullagh
Steps

My life was changed when you arrived,
I moved from Rock to lullaby.
I watched you as you grew and thrived
Just Daddy and his little guy.

When first you learned to ride your bike
and, wobbling, you sped away
I had a weird sensation that
I had just grown a touch more grey.

through every step of life with you
from nursery school through your degree
I paid the bills, I gave the rides
Life's afternoon you walked with me.

Afterwards, out with your friends
some beauties' eyes attracted you.
You stayed out late with your dates.
and I could not wait up for you.

Still later when you moved away,
and had a family of your own.
I didn't get to see you much,
we kept in touch mostly by phone.

Life is a journey, not a state
We knew this day would come for me
When I must go embrace my fate
and you must bide your destiny.

Our paths diverge, just yours goes on.
but do not stop to grieve for me.
I always knew this day would come
That I'd become a memory.

For so it was, and will always be
We parents bring life to this world
We start out as your guide and friend
never to see the journey end.
The fallen leaves of red and gold await me and my rake.
As I'm in a reflective mood, they'll simply have to wait.
I am in my sixties now, my body feels the cold.
I know I am no longer young, yet am I really old?
I admire nature's bold broad strokes; these brightly colored leaves.
(I would enjoy them twice as much if they'd vanish on a breeze)
Soon I'll have them raked and bagged for the garbage man to take.
(We used to burn them in years gone by, but that was a mistake.)
Now in the autumn of my life, on this crisp October morn,
My life's choices have all been made and all my children born.
Time, surely, I must yet have time to sing the song of life;
time to enjoy our quiet house, just me and the wife.
A time when I'll compose bad verse, influenced by red wine.
Yet who among us can be sure they're not on stoppage time.
Should I fall, prematurely, like these leaves of gold and red,
I hope all I have loved in life speak kindly of the dead.

John F. McCullagh
At the Nassau County Medical Center We nurses were put on alert; A truck hit a small car on the L.I.E. leaving someone in a world of hurt. Our “John Doe” was being air lifted and we heard the copter drone near. One look at his face and I knew he was gone from this world of Love and Fear. Yes, we all knew it was Harry from his unmistakable leonine mane; The charts had him labeled as “John Doe” but we knew who it was just the same. The doctors, like heroes, were fighting to bring Harry back from the grave But his heart had been pierced by a sliver of glass; there was no way that he could be saved. Had his heart failed him, there on the roadway, or had he been killed in the crash. I couldn’t feel mad at the trucker who did what he could at the last. We found a gold watch in his pocket. “Harry F. Chapin” engraved. A man who had fought to save others but who himself could not save.

John F. McCullagh
Strange Bedfellows

The first night that they slept apart
-I think because he had a cough-
He grabbed his pillow from their bed
Mimed a kiss and then was off.

Their separation lingered on
like cancer growing in a womb
Days into weeks turned into years
each spouse in their separate room.

Anniversaries came apace
To the separate cells wherein they dwell
All marveled at “togetherness.”
None could glimpse their private hell

No kiss, no glance, no warm embrace
As would ward off a winter’s chills
No passionate heat or casual lust
Not that either needed pills

And then one day he failed to wake
Cool to her touch, she felt his arm
Detachedly she looked upon
Her love, long dead, now gone

She lay down on the bed once shared
And swallowed pills enough and more
To join her fellow in that sleep
They’d share together evermore.

John F. McCullagh
Strange Magic

At the present we've a POTUS
so generous and kind,
He'll 'share' whatever I have
with his voters of like mind.
So it strikes me as peculiar
that wealth disparity still grows.
That the fabled one percent
keep looking at us down their nose.
The Banksters stole our Billions
yet not one spent time in jail.
Do you think they told the President-
'The check is in the mail'?
Those high hogs keep getting fatter-
the buffet has them in thrall.
Just like hogs they'll be surprised
when the slaughter starts this Fall.

John F. McCullagh
Strangers On A Train

I boarded the train a long time ago, back East,
in the company of good friends.
We had good times on our journey.
Those days were invariably pleasant.
I recall bright sun and skies, mostly, blue
At each stop along the way there were
some exits and entrances.
At first they did not touch me.
Then;
I remember this most painfully-
The day you told me that we had reached your station.
That place where you could accompany me no more.

My surviving companions did what they could to console me.
The train proceeded determinedly west.
The terrain was mostly flat, the skies now grey and wet.
We knew that the Mountains loomed ahead;
massively real; to us passengers yet unseen.
We traveled the rails laid down by others' hands.
We passed through snow-capped peaks
through darkness into the light.

I have had a wondrous journey.
But, excuse me friends, my stop is just ahead.
I step out to a golden promised land.

John F. McCullagh
There was a man upon a time-
a man of genius rare-
Who strove to read the mind of God
And breathe the Empyrean air.

He taught at University
And gathered students round
Philosophy, Theology,
He sought their common ground

He’d count the angels on a pin
He lived a life of prayer
He learned nine million names for God
Then fell into despair.

Until one night a blinding light
Drove Thomas to the floor
And from his knees the signs he saw
Reduced his works to straw.

To get the heavens in your head
Is tedious work indeed
To get your head to heaven
Is a useful simple creed.

John F. McCullagh
Subliminal

In a long happy marriage
Sometimes bedtime grows stale
Once toe curling sex fades
As libidos doth fail.

We both have tough jobs
And two kids of our own.
Sad, we both want to sleep
When we’re finally alone

The man at the store
Said “I have just the thing.
You really should try it-
makes your sex life take wing!”

It wasn’t a porn flick
Or a blue pill to swallow,
Just a tiny transmitter
to hide in her pillow.

At night, as she slept,
The salesman explained
My subliminal message
would be fed to her brain.

With her passions inflamed
She would turn to her mate
Like the once nubile bride-
Leave the rest up to fate.

So I made a recording
With a saucy suggestion
Then looked forward to bedtime
hoping for the res-errection.

My bride’s a deep sleeper,
(A good thing since I snore)
The tape’s played two weeks now
And I still haven’t scored.
I completely was baffled
That salesman assured
That no “wood” would go wasted
No boner ignored.

Instead every night
About two thirty nine
I’d slip off to the bath
Where the “beat” would go on

I resolved to return
The unhelpful device
Before the guarantee ended
And I’d be out the price

Imagine my shock,
imagine my dread
When I found the transmitter
in my pillow instead!

Seems my wife had decided
To play with my head:
“Honey, go f8ck yourself,
If you wake me, you’re dead.”

John F. McCullagh
The deceased was seventeen years old-
An enlarged heart, the coroner claims.
A basketball player on the court.
his team trailing in the game.
Their perfect season was at risk
when he shot and made a “Three”
He then collapsed upon the court
midst shouts of victory.

Hearts are unromantic things
That race and slow by turns.
They simply pump
While we run and jump
And prance about life’s stage.

We take for granted our own hearts
As we wander through our days.
Our faithful friend who never sleeps
So we can laugh and play

And when hearts fail we feel the pain
Of songs now left unsung.
That’s why we’re haunted by the tales
of Athletes dying young.

John F. McCullagh
Sugar Daddy

A lovely Latina caught Don Sterling’s eye

And, for sure, there’s no fool like an old one.

It helped he has Billions, You know I don’t lie-

because you must give sums to get some.

His wife got upset, (you know how they get)

As she saw their cash flow out the door.

“Two cars and a condo! I’ll make him regret

the day he encountered that whore.”

The wife sued the mistress for her “ill gotten” gains,

half of it hers by the law.

Then they caught Don, on tape,

Spewing sound bites of hate-

Now he can’t run his team anymore.

A little blue pill can do old men ill-

It deceives them to think they’re a Stallion.

The next time you reach for an eighteen year old, Don,

I suggest that you pour a MacCallan.
(MacCallan 18 year old single Malt Scotch Whiskey)

John F. McCullagh
Sunset Boulevard

"When I was one and twenty, I partied every night
and still was ready for my close-up in the early morning light.
By the time I hit my thirties this girl stayed in every night.
With the proper rest and makeup I could still get parts all right.
Now that I've turned forty I've abandoned film for the stage.
(The poetry of youth decays into prose by middle age.)
On the boards I can play younger. In the right light I still get by,
But my film career is over because
The camera doesn't lie."

John F. McCullagh
Superstar

I would listen, in the dark, as the L.P. circled round.  
A big fan, I'll admit it, of this petite brunette's sound.  
I was shocked the day I heard you'd starved yourself to death.  
Talent, beauty, youth all gone; the recordings all you left.  
I hear you still at the holidays like a ghost of Christmas past.  
Occasionally on the radio for your hits were built to last.  
Most often when your C.D. plays as I drift off to sleep  
So long ago, so long ago, but still your voice sounds so sweet.  
Those who touch lips with fame die twice I've heard it told:  
Once when we've forgotten them, then again when they grow cold.

John F. McCullagh
Survivor

The Sound of their laughter
in the dream, I still hear.
I wake up in a sweat
with their screams in my ears.
On a road trip to Tucson,
my teammates and I
met with disaster
and two of them died.
Our team van blew a tire
at a high rate of speed.
It flipped on the highway.
I can still hear the screams.
I kicked out a window
when the van came to a stop.
and dragged out my teammates
off of the blacktop
It was then I lost consciousness
the state trooper said.
I saw white sheets pulled
over two of our dead.
He said I was lucky
and so it must seem
to someone who never
had to wake from the dream

John F. McCullagh
Survivor Guilt

I’d worked the previous night, the tenth, programing applications. When the alarm went off at four A.M. I hit snooze- no hesitation. Eventually my feet found floor, I stumbled to the shower. A routine usually done in ten took me a half an hour. I was running up the platform steps but my train just left the station. Great, I will be late for sure, I thought, in consternation. At least the day was perfect, Warm and clear, no threat of rain. I fished and found my monthly and took the next westbound train. The “E” was fairly crowded When I boarded it at Penn I’d missed the first and I was glad Another quickly came. Beneath the streets of Gotham The subway lurched downtown. Above all hell was breaking loose as two large planes were down. I climbed the stairs up to the street And entered the inferno The sky now black from billowing smoke Bright day turning nocturnal.

A Seven thirty Seven’s wheel- I heard a woman screaming I saw a body at my feet Were we at war or was I dreaming? I stared up at the place I’d left- where I worked the night before.
Where flames and smoke leapt to the sky-
where my co workers were no more.
They’re jumping, someone shouted
I saw black specks launch from on high.
Better to die on the street
Than to suffocate or fry.

I turn and ran, I am ashamed.
No Hero’s tale to tell.
I was a safe way away
when the first tower fell.

Had I not hit the button
or dawdled in the shower.
Had I caught my usual train
I’d be dead in the tower.

This is my shame and burden
To live when others died.
Preserved by fate and circumstance
From terror from the sky.

John F. McCullagh
Syria

The enemy of my enemy
Is not, necessarily, a friend to me.
Sectarian based enmity
In Syria abounds.
Cruise missile strikes certainly
Will be followed by the I.E.D.’s
As surely as boots on the ground
Will result in stone topped
Grassy mounds.

John F. McCullagh
Taking Dad To A Game

The Polo Grounds, when the Field’s first seen
are a most magical shade of green.
Hand in hand, me and my Dad
head for our seats in the right field stands.

It’s the Cincinnati Reds in town
to play the New York Mets.
There’s a double header scheduled,
How much better could it get?

Cincinnati took the first game
by a score of three to nil.
My hot dog was delicious
Dad had a beer to swill.

The nightcap was a wild affair
The Mets won thirteen- twelve.
You could look it up, as Casey said,
if you should care to delve.

We rode the subway home that night
side by side, me and my Dad.
We reminisced about the game
Like the most knowledgeable fans

The Q44 from Flushing took us
up Queensboro Hill,
past Carvel and Booth Memorial,
I remember it well still.

My father turned to look at me
as five decades creased my brow.
Making us the self same age
What he was then, so I am now.

Thirty years, about, its been
Since last I saw my Dad.
The dead don't get to baseball games,
Which I think is rather sad.
They can't enjoy a summer night
on the wrong side of the grass.
And an ice cold beer is greatly missed-
They can't pour themselves a glass

In memory, we still can walk
With those who came before.
So I took my Dad to a baseball game
What was I waiting for?

John F. McCullagh
Tears Of A Clown

We knew only your laughter which won you renown.
We never observed the tears of our clown.

You entered our homes as the loveable Mork;
with Your razor sharp wit and lightning fast thought.

Your movies mixed laughter with serious turns;
Good Will earned you an Oscar For which many yearn.

There were personal demons that proved hard to hide.
A divorce, an affair, Drugs and rehab besides.

But, through it all, We heard only the laughter.
Not the tears of our Clown that brought on this disaster.

To us you were Robin, Like Peter Pan, just a kid.
May this sleep bring you peace that your days never did.

John F. McCullagh
Temporum Transeat, Quae Mutatio

Time passes, Things change.
Nothing, it seems, remains the same.
Except, of course,
your stone hard heart-
The unmoved mover,
Alone, apart.
For so it has been-
and so it remains-
as things pass
as Times change.

John F. McCullagh
Ten

Ten years have passed, Ten, to the day,
Since Cancer took her breath away.
We survivors, left forlorn,
consoled each other as we mourned.
That day a Father lost his child
and was never after seen to smile.
Faith was tested on that day
as each in turn would kneel to pray.
Time, inexorable in its way,
sought to efface our tears away,
as snow and rain and biting wind
efface letters incused in stone.
Time has failed, we can't forget
the loss of our beloved Jeanette.
We who survive, recall the day,
It's stifling heat, the lack of air.
The horror of that ringing phone
That brought the tragic news to home.
Ten years have passed, Ten years she's gone.
Ten years we've had to soldier on.
This day we pause to think of then
And weep for all that might have been.

John F. McCullagh
Terrible Swift Sword

It raged across five Aprils, killed 600,000 sons,
but now, there was a chance for peace, if Johnston wanted one.
Some urged a guerrilla war, a game of hit and run,
but Johnston saw a suffering South and knew this must be done.
He called a truce with Sherman to surrender his command.
In truth, I think he would have rather shook the Devil’s hand.
The defeated kept their horses, and were paroled back to their homes.
This land once more united, its prior sins atoned.
For every drop of blood that had been spilled by blow or lash
had been matched, drop for drop, in every bloody clash.
On the ninth of April 65’ Rebels tore their battle flags
and little strips of colored cloth were given to each man.
The flags were not surrendered to become the spoils of war.
They fraternized with men they would have killed the day before.
Now all who had survived the war, all but one, would live.
Good Friday night would claim the last that Lincoln had to give.

John F. McCullagh
That Which Endures

The artist, with his canvas before him, was upset with the uncertain light. Glowering clouds cast their shadows on the scene he'd attempt to impart. The dust of an angry volcano made splendid the end of this day. Mere memory couldn't encompass the sunset that before him lay. He hurried to capture the moment as the willful Sun dashed off to play.

The result was a chiaroscuro - a shading of light into dark. Though, sadly, his vision is failing, what endures forever is art.

John F. McCullagh
The Affordable Pet Act

Pet Meds are expensive!
Chuck Schumer says it's so!
So He'll co-sponsor legislation
To make sure costs are low.
If kitty needs some birth control
before her nightly prowl,
the taxpayers will gladly pay.
If not then Chuck will scowl.
Why shouldn't people without pets
Pay for those who do?
He'll make them pay for strays as well-
It's a Democrat's World view.
You may think the world has gone to hell
as our border teems with trash.
The Ukraine is on fire.
Jews are fighting with Hamas.
Yet none of these disasters
has made Chuck's passion burn.
Even Vets who fought our wars
are not Chuck's main concern.
It's Vets, who deal with cats and dogs.
It's far too much they earn.
Why is this his main concern?
Why does he want it passed?
Because it deals with animal rights
And he's a horse's a**

John F. McCullagh
The Angel

I woke up from my nightmare
To find I’m not alone.
The intruder in my bedroom
Is no one I’d have known.

The stranger seemed not to notice
That their presence was discovered.
I did nothing to alert him
half hidden by the covers.

In Stature, he stood eight feet tall,
the same height as the door.
Hus massive shoulders bore his wings
Which trailed down to the floor.

My mirrored wall intrigued him-
By his own visage he’s obsessed
Perhaps he was hermaphrodite,
in white robes loosely dressed.

His trunk and Manly Mien
put me in mind of Saul.
His hair and face more beautiful
than Eve’s daughters, one and all.

Could this have been an angel
sent here from the God of Love?
Sent here to accompany me
as I made my way above.

But, alas, the odor of Brimstone
Suggests it is not so.
That and the sight of his singed wings
Told me which way I’d go

John F. McCullagh
The Angel Of Death

An Angel without pity,
No conscience ridden whore,
She haunts the field of battle.
She’s seen the cost of war.

In the faces of the dying
She’s reflected in their eyes.
She coming to collect their souls,
Not listen to their sighs.

She clearly fascinates them
As they gurgle blood and die.
They find her mesmerizing
Like the hunting cobra’s eyes.

To the dying she’s a beauty
unlike any seen before.
Still they’d rather be in Paris,
Smoking Gitaines with some whore.

John F. McCullagh
The Annex

These empty rooms
devoid of life,
behind a bookcase
in the hall.
This was, for a time,
our home
while the Germans
held the Dutch in thrall.
My wife since dead from hunger,
my daughters in a common grave.
I, Otto Frank, the sole survivor.
Is there no one I can save?
Annelise, my dearest daughter,
Miep Gies gave me your book.
The Germans cast it on the floor
without a second look.
Here in your words I find
perhaps not all of you has died.
Here your words may speak
for all who suffered, all who cried.
Its small comfort for an old man,
broken, ready for the grave,
but my girl might be a symbol
for all those we could not save.

John F. McCullagh
The Anniversary

fifty years to the day since she walked down this aisle;
The aisle of this church where he stood with a smile.
The organ swells now as the organ swelled then
but the music is played now by a different hand.
The Saints and the angels; they still look the same.
They've been cleaned and restored, each one, frame by frame.

Her matron of honor this time can't attend.
She moved down to Florida when Sandy blew in
The best man back then was her brother in law
but he died in the desert in the first Iraq war.
As she moves to the altar, her grown son has her arm
He is tall like her Father was, but Dad is long gone.

Her love waits at the Altar, dressed in his best clothes
in a bronze colored casket, in eternal repose.
On this anniversary of the day they were wed
this day she will hear a requiem instead.
Then later, instead of the bouquet, she knows
she's going to be tossing a single red rose.

John F. McCullagh
The Anthem For Damned Youth

His battles now are over, his earthly struggles done.
We place him in a body bag; a Mother's only son.
We do not speak of "Sacrifice" or patriotic pap.
Such thoughts deserted long before our third tour in Iraq.
Some will say our eyes are hard that will not shed a tear
For the promise of his future that abruptly ended here.

We who serve know differently; Our wounds you cannot see.
His helmet, gun and empty boots remind us of his Calvary.
So thank him for his service; spare us the other crap.
Just play the anthem for dammed youth;

a simple tune called Taps.

John F. McCullagh
The Arsonist

Your fire red lips should have caused me alarm-
or the smoldering look in your eyes.
You lured me away from the bar where we met,
I was having a beer with the guys.
There was the faint hint of smoke in your hair
But, in Vegas, that's par for the course.
I shouldn't have listened to your siren song
But I'm a free man, just divorced.
Besides, I've heard it said
That a redhead in bed
Is about the best lover you'll find.
When her burning bush beckoned
Who was I to resist?
I'm not in the monogamous bind.
Now I'm bound and I'm gagged
and secured to her bed.
From this pyre I never will rise.
She's just emptied the last of that
Five gallon can.
Her lit match will complete
my demise.
'I hope you don't mind
That I leave you behind.'
She said as the flames start to roar.
'your Ex is a far better lover than you.'
She laughed as she walked through the door.

John F. McCullagh
The Artifact Thief

You would think him a villain; you would call him a thief
But he would just shrug and say "We all have to eat."
On the Petersburg siege lines, he'd just made a score;
A rusted old bayonet used in our Civil War.

There are scores of collectors who would pay a good price.
They wouldn't ask questions, they wouldn't think twice.
He cared nothing for the History of the Blue and the Grey.
Only for the money the collector would pay.

The Sun was descending when he left from the Park
He bought some Tequila, to drink in the dark.
in a third rate motel that didn't leave the lights on.
By three the next morning the Tequila was gone.

The thief had bad dreams, in his booze induced sleep.
of a specter in gray at his bed near his feet:
The ghost of a drummer from that long ago war.
The thief shook with fear at the visage he saw.

The blade he had stolen was now in the Ghost's hands.
The ghost grimly eyed him with the eyes of one dammed.
The blade shattered his ribs and ripped him apart.
As darkness descended it tore open his heart..

The medical examiner was called the next day.
A horrified maid found the body, they say.
His room had been locked. He'd bled out on the ground
The hall cameras showed nothing; no weapon was found

John F. McCullagh
The Audacity To Grope (Rep. Eric Massa)

I did not lie, I just misspoke
Contributions, not bribes, help decide my vote.
As of right now, I'm an outcast
because Health care hasn't passed.

I did not have sex with that man.
I merely groped him with my hand
And certainly not in a sexual way
He just misunderstood my play.

For surely I just played around-
I tickled him and held him down.
He took offense at things I’d say
It’s just my salty seadog way

Help me, Glenn Beck, to make this clear-
For I am groping blindly here,
Searching for the words to say
to make this whole thing go away.

Barney Frank does this and more
And ranks a chairman on the floor
So if gay lust drove me to do this
I need to run in Massachusetts

In D.C. same sex is no vice
Gay couples wed, we all toss rice.
The secret reason I've been dammed?
-I consort with known Republicans.

John F. McCullagh
The Axe Concerto

Grandfather John, my mother's dad, remarried later on in life.
When he passed on his vast wealth passed largely to this second wife.
Thus did her children benefit from the bulk of his estate.
My mother and my Uncle John relatively little, sad to state.
Sometime after the internment date a piano was shipped to our home.
A piece Step- Grandma didn't want
She didn't play and lived alone.
When my mother was a child living up in Marble Hill
She'd learned to play the instrument that now she merely wished to kill.
In mortal rage she grabbed an axe and like a batter swung away
It was a fair bit of exercise (She had played baseball in her day.)
Such sounds that spinet then produced were likely never heard before.
such atonal melodies as she ripped and smashed its core.

the Axe concerto was concluded when only splinters still remained
She went and stored the axe away- After than she never played

John F. McCullagh
The Babe

She was wearing a white linen suit,  
the skirt just above the knees.  
Of course her hair was golden.  
Of course those breasts were D's.  
Her golden tresses framed a face  
with eyes, Aeolian blue.  
Those hips could launch a thousand ships,  
if Helen's myth be true.

I slowed down for the orange light,  
not my modus operandi.  
My wife became suspicious-  
then she spotted my eye candy.  
"Don't be staring at that girl.'  
she said, petulantly.  
'What girl? ' I said,  
the light turned red,  
disingenuously

John F. McCullagh
The stands are full of cheering fans
As I wait to say goodbye.
My bat serves as a crutch for me
just weeks before I’ll die.

This day in June is cold and gray,
windy, overcast and bitter.
No warmth touches my wasted frame,
I’m a mere shadow of a hitter

The grandstands are abuzz with life
I shed a single tear.
I always was a man apart,
Larger than life, I hear.

My lusts and appetites were great-
more than a mortal man’s--.
but the syllogisms true
And that is all I am.

They do not know, they cannot know
about my hopes and fears.
They see just the fading icon
Of their own glory years.

John F. McCullagh
The Banquet Of Consequences

For years we've consumed
far more than we grow-
preferring to reap
what we disdained to sow.
Our savings outstripped
by the sums that we owe.
Sooner or later
we ride to our fall
the banquet of consequences
awaits for us all.

Published today 10.01
Based on a quote from Robert Louis Stevenson; 'sooner or later we all sit down to a banquet of consequences.'

John F. McCullagh
&quot;I desire to gain wisdom.&quot; said the acolyte to the Priest. 
&quot;There are many paths to wisdom, Karol, imitation is the least.&quot; 
&quot;In imitating someone who you perceive to be wise, 
A false sophistication you display before men's eyes.&quot; 
&quot;Experience is the hardest path, contemplation is the best. 
Read widely and love deeply, Karol, and be ready for the test.&quot; 
&quot;In suffering there is wisdom gained for those who are devout. 
The stony path to Golgotha we cannot do without.&quot; 

&quot;Consider the fate of common grapes ripening on the vine. 
Some may become raisins in the withering sunshine. 
Others will be squeezed for juice or fermented into wine. 
The rest will be distilled and become brandy in due time.&quot; 
&quot;Each you see is useful, transformed by the Vintner's art.&quot; 
&quot;Our lives are not our own but each must play his part.&quot; 

Father Figlewicz began the mass with Karol as his server. 
They were the only souls that day that came to the Cathedral. 
Outside, the Stukas bombed Krakow, the City would not stand. 
Evil, like a darkening cloud, spread out across the land. 
For many years Poles were enslaved, trapped in Dictator's hands, 
But Karol Wojtyla was a most uncommon man. 
He would not forget his people, he would work and never cease 
Until the day the Soviet fell and Poland was released. 

John F. McCullagh
The Bequest

When my wife’s great Aunt ‘Dora died
We received a strange bequest.
Not land or Gold or Mallomars
But a box, covered in dust.

Her will strictly enjoined us
from opening the box.
The sides had cryptic puzzles
That served it as strong locks

The box was rather ornate
Carved from finest sandalwood
Inlaid with golden letters
a Greek would have understood.

We both took very seriously
The task to guard this prize
To keep this family heirloom
preserved from prying eyes..

Ten years it stood there in our room
An enigmatic guest
And often I would ponder it
while I was getting dressed.

Until one dark December day
In the Millennial year
Curiosity overcame my wife
And she succumbed, I fear.

My Darling, being curious,
Solved the riddles on the side
She was just prying up the lid
As I ran inside..

A disembodied Banshee screamed
The air was thick and red.
I rushed to close the box back up
in existential dread.

Still, the world seemed little changed
As I sequestered hope.
The radio said by 5-4
George Bush had won the vote

I think on all that’s happened since
As things have gone to Hell
Bloody wars in foreign lands
Discord at home as well.

Since then twin towers crashed and burned
And Wall Street did the same
Do you think it could be possible
Aunt Pandora’s Box shares blame?

John F. McCullagh
The Best I Ever Had.

I can recall her I first loved when we were in our teens. We planned to marry way too young; such was our childish dream. In truth she was too beautiful for one of common clay With a body like a Goddess, but I fumbled it away.

I recall another summer's Love, so different in her way. She was an intellectual who also loved to play. We picnicked out at planting fields, I still recall our time I still remember thinking she's the best I'd ever find.

A dark eyed beauty first I loved, then a strawberry red. I remember feeling awestruck when she came with me to bed. Yes, she had another love and kept me on a sting. Perhaps I tarried there too long but I don't regret a thing.

Winter melted into spring and brought my next romance; a lovely little brunette; you taught me how to dance. We shared drinks before the fire in a snug little pub I knew. I'll admit it wasn't difficult to fall in love with you

Our relationship was, tempestuous. Perhaps that's being kind. Yet, whenever I think of you, I find some cause to smile. You were different from the others, all the others I have known. I remember how we treasured stolen moments spent alone

I choose not to apologize for leaving you so sad. I regret I never said that you're the best I ever had.

I was surely no Lothario; I was decent in the main. I remember all who loved me and we did not love in vain. I recall each name and face and the memories make me glad But my wife and mother of my child is the best I've ever had.

John F. McCullagh
The Big Bang

They had waited on blankets, in cars, to view the Chrysanthemum stars. Instead of a pyrotechnic display, The authorities sent them away. A brief blast of frightening power consumed at once many a flower. It appears a computer malfunction was the cause of the mini eruption. The engineered boom had gone bust. Makes you wonder- now who can you trust? In the desert that night 'neath the stars Jupiter, Venus and Mars put on their free, nightly, display. People on blankets, in cars very seldom look up to the stars. There a bowlful of wonder and light goes sight unseen most every night. The gift of a child's sense of wonder goes unwrapped by these mortals down under.

John F. McCullagh
The Black Hours

It's too delicate to touch, but beautiful to behold.  
An Illuminated prayer book, from Bruges, I've been told.  
The unknown artist carbonized vellum taken from a sheep,  
Into a thing of beauty that is not mine to keep.  
The images are beautiful, a celebration of the Divine,  
a testament of faith from another place and time.

John F. McCullagh
The Blonde In The Red Leather Booth

I was sitting in Katz Delicatessen
waiting for Sam to arrive,
when this blonde with her date
made their entrance.
They took seats in a booth on the side.

You know I'm not given to gossip
but I couldn't not hear if I tried.
They were speaking of sexual matters,
all about faked orgasms and lies.

The Blonde started bucking and shaking,
moving her head side to side.
She muttered God's name in her frenzy,
pretending her Lovers inside.

The booth smelled of sex and red leather
The Petite-Mort faked with great pride.
I muttered 'I'll have what she's having.'
to the waitress who stood by my side.

John F. McCullagh
The Blood Red Rose

A solitary rose,
it could not understand
why it was deprived of life
by the cultivator's hand.

A solitary rose,
clutched in a mourner's fingers
waits the presenting of the flag
as the last note of "Taps" still lingers

A solitary Rose,
it could not understand
why its life was at the mercy
of the passing of this man.

A solitary Rose
wise beyond its time
is accepting of its fate
as the mourners stand in line

A solitary rose
flung upon a box of wood.
feels the sun a final time
as it is covered up for good.

Our ancestors made sacrifice
to expiate their sin.
The blood red rose, symbolic
of what flows beneath our skin.

John F. McCullagh
The Bookkeeper Of Auschwitz

The old man, grey, bespectacled, with difficulty, rose from his chair.
If he’d come to plead for mercy, I doubt he’d find it here.
He struggled to stand steady with his Zimmer walking frame
As he gave his testimony we all felt his sense of shame.

“I was there when all this happened; I saw the smoke rise to the sky.
I saw the piles of ashes that were once like you and I.
I counted stolen valuables; Money, watches, gold.
I dared not speak objection. I did as I was told.”

He asked for a glass of water; this much he did receive.
He testified an hour without asking for reprieve.
He spoke about those distant days we see in black and white.
Of a Germany destroyed by debt and burning for a fight.
He then was young and good with numbers
He was the bookkeeper of Auschwitz;
He can’t un-see all he did see.

Although he never shot a girl or stabbed a sleeping child,
He’d tallied up their worldly goods to add them to the pile.
When the Russians over-ran the camp, he and the others fled.
They left behind warehouses full of the possessions of the dead.
The Jury must deliberate about what punishment is due
For this ninety year old Nazi who kept track of baby shoes.

John F. McCullagh
The Boomer's Lament (A Country Western Song)

By the order of the Marshall
We don't live here any more
Our stuff is on the lawn
and there's a padlock on our door.
Then, while I was distracted,
reading the decree
Thieves made off with my HDTV

I once worked as a loan officer
at Mega Billions bank
We made some bad decisions
as the staff and assets shrank.
I was escorted from my desk
the day I got the shank-
My Boss made bonus- he has
TARP to thank.

By the order of the Marshall
We don't live here any more
Our stuff is on the lawn
and there's a padlock on our door.
Then, while I was distracted,
reading the decree
Thieves made off with my HDTV.

My Kid is off in College
working hard for his degree
He'll graduate with a B.S.
in compared Anatomy.
When his student loans come due
He'd better not ask me
Twenty two and out is my decree.

By the order of the Marshall
We don't live here any more
Our stuff is on the lawn
and there's a padlock on our door.
Then, while I was distracted,
reading the decree,
Thieves made off with my HDTV.

I got our stuff in storage
and we're down at Motel Six
It's hard for us to sleep at night-
The girl next door turns tricks.
Our bank accounts yield nothing
and We're hostage to the VIX
I gave up my season tickets to the Knicks.

By the order of the Marshall
We don't live here any more
Our stuff is on the lawn
and there's a padlock on our door.
Then, while I was distracted,
reading the decree,
Thieves made off with my HDTV.

John F. McCullagh
The Bough Breaks

The tree boughs bend
Beneath the weight
Of chilling crystal
Icicles.

I pick my way
a random walk
Headed to
Tommy's up the hill.

A branch breaks off
And hurdles down
It barely missed me
on the ground

“God sure must love you! ”
said the sister of my friend.
“You just escaped
A tragic end”

-but had it borne in
for the kill.
could you accept it
as God’s will?

John F. McCullagh
The Boxer

His pressure was mounting
along with his weight.
He got into training
a little bit late.

In the grey light of morning
He'd be seen on the street.
sweating it out
on sneaker clad feet.

He sparred with his partners.
with few in the stands.
Then pummel the light bag
with lightening fast hands.

The fight date was approaching
and no one in the State
gave him much of a chance
of escaping his fate.

The champ was unbeaten.
He ground his foes down.
They'd be down, looking up
at the Champ looking down.

How then to cope
with an unbeatable foe?
This cup would not pass
even if he wished it so.

He was not getting younger,
This was his last shot.
Would he be one more challenger
that history forgot?

He was no timid soul,
avoiding the chance.
He'd go down swinging.
No regrets, he would dance.
He stepped into the ring
and they stood toe to toe
They touched gloved hands together
When the bell rings, you go.

John F. McCullagh
The Burial Detail

Is hate too strong a word for what remains when Love has died?
They were for twenty years estranged before his suicide.
Now he rests in his fine blue suit and his patriotic tie.
There she sits in her fine black dress but her tears have long since dried.
Their marriage had been childless, then joyless at the end,
Still she felt an obligation as he had no next of kin,
She handled all his final arrangements but is friends all though it strange
Though he had requested an internment, she consigned him to the flames.

John F. McCullagh
The Call

We must have picked up the call at the same time
I heard my wife answer the phone.
The voice was a friend but the words that he said
were intended for her ears alone.

I stood in stunned silence and feeling betrayed
at the words that I heard over the phone.
There was worse yet ahead, those three words she said;
'I love you.' made me feel so alone.

Things hadn't been good, this much I understood.
Passions can fade over time.
Daily life's dull routine never matches the dream,
But I'd thought it no cause for alarm.

'I Love You. She said, but not for my ears.
I had not heard them for some time.
How could I miss the perfunctory kiss?
cold leftovers at dinner time.

I hung up the receiver, did they hear a click?
I wonder how long she'd have lied?
My only thought then was which one I'd kill first
And could it look like suicide.

John F. McCullagh
The Care Giver

The face that spoke of suffering
is now, forever, still
The torture done,
Her race is run,
Her effigy serene.
Yet as she lingered by death's door
your kind voice could be heard-
Your gently spoken words of Love-
She cherished every word.
If there is life beyond this life
its far beyond our ken.
At least she knew your gentle touch
at this journeys end.

John F. McCullagh
The Carpenter (Via Appia, 23/03/44)

The Warden roused them early
on this, their final day.
He marched them out on hobbled feet-
Grey trucks took them away.

Doctors, lawyers, engineers,
All captured in a raid.
German Soldiers had been killed
Reprisals must be made..

Fathers, Husbands, sons all caught
within the Nazi snare.
Among them was a carpenter
Who bowed his head in prayer.

He’d walk the hills of Rome no more
Nor touch a lover’s check
Here, near the Via Appia
He’d find eternal sleep.

Five by five they entered in
to the foreboding cave.
There they knelt for benediction,
the kind that pistols gave.

The cave became a charnel house
Each man shot in the head.
It reeked of blood and excrement
Flies feasted on the dead.

The carpenter fell once or twice.
Can blood for blood atone? .
His killers coveted his coat
and forced him to disrobe.

By now they had grown sloppy
with drink and hate and fear.
The first shot missed completely
The second grazed his ear.

In seconds live eternities
He said his final prayer:
“Forgevethem,Father, even this
done out of hate and fear

several shots rang out just then
each found his noble head
they shot him once more, in his side
to make sure he was dead.

Explosions rocked and sealed the cave
With tons of rock and stone
They didn’t think to post a guard
The grey trucks drove back home.

John F. McCullagh
The Cenotaph

In Whitehall stands a monument,
A column wrought in stone.
Empty as that mother's heart
whose sons did not come home.
It bears the dates of two world wars,
And three carved words I read.
A politician's shibboleth
About "the Glorious Dead"
Standing in November's rain,
No glory came to mind.
Perhaps that word held meaning
in another place and time.
They have passed from living memory
those soldier boys of thine.
Now bronze reliefs and marble wreaths
Recall their deaths to mind.

John F. McCullagh
The Challenger Seven

I remember when they waved goodbye,
and left the earth behind
A roar, then an explosion
Indelible in my mind.

That crew was a mosaic
Of America that year;
White, Black Female, Asian
All represented here.

There was a teacher on the flight
Her school kids looking on
How hard then to explain to them
That Mrs. McAuliffe's gone.

Like Drake upon the Ocean
of an earlier place and time.
They died while on a mission
to expand the human mind.

They waved goodbye that morning
Slipped the surly bonds of sod
And set out on their journey
To touch the face of God.

John F. McCullagh
The Cheery Herald Of Despair

The community of Astronomers
mourns a colleague rare:
Brian Marsden, late of Cambridge,
The Cheery Herald of Despair.

His group tracked rocks
that threaten shocks
to Earth’s Blue biosphere.
He would be first to sound alarms
when asteroids’ ventured near.

His work for the Smithsonian
tracked wanderers in the sky.
He predicted paths for comets
calculating their flybys.

Working with a shoestring budget
And a small but gallant crew.
When others wondered what was up
He wondered not- he knew.

When objects near were cause for fear
He’d brief the tabloid press.
Just a near miss, but next time round
It’s anybody’s guess.”

John F. McCullagh
The Clock Radio

Unwelcome and unbidden
You break into my dream
You rouse my still hung over brain
And make me want to scream.

Four forty in the morning
I’m not enthused to view.
Not even “snooze” begins to soothe
The hate I feel for you.

I could have slept through music
Ignored a talk show too
But your blasted beeping buzzing
Always bores right through

I reach across to silence you
You foul and thoughtless thing
For God sakes it’s my one day off
What possessed you now to ring?

John F. McCullagh
The Copse Of Trees

We started out like Armistead from the shelter of the trees. The wind whipped by like a Fusillade, the high grass at our knees..

The wind blew cold that autumn day As we started up the rise- The prospect of the copse of trees Before us was the prize.

The flower of Virginia once Paraded where we stepped Until the double canister Decimated those still left

Our force of two, no longer young Stumbled up the hill Numb with cold and short of breath Proceeding forth on will.

No enfilading fire now From the ghosts behind stone walls Just wood post fences six feet high Might our progress stall..

Brave Dick Gannett was unhorsed Upon this very spot Kemper, wounded mortally, Was retrieved from shell and shot

We made it past the final fence And up the grassy knoll Defiant in the cannons mouth (They’re unloaded, so we’re bold)

We passed the stone that marks the spot
Where Armistead left life  
Where Rebel forces crested  
Like the storm wave at its height.

The blue bellies yelled Fredericksburg  
As the Crimson tide retraced  
Half in Anger, Half in relief  
that the challenge had been faced.

The hill before the copse of trees  
Pocked with the dead and dying  
While the remnants of Picketts men  
Towards Longstreets line were filing

The victors and the vanquished both  
long since have passed away.  
And left mute stones and monuments  
to mark brave deeds that day.

And we, the heirs of Union, stand.  
Upon the very spot  
That marks the high tide of the South  
- what might have been was not.

John F. McCullagh
The Counterfeit Inspector

Scottish single malts are loved by fans here and abroad. Some folks will pay a fortune for rare bottles they can hoard. Whenever a commodity becomes as rare as gold, there always will be criminals with profit as their goal. They'll find an empty bottle and forge tax stamps for it too and fill it up with Canadian Club, a far far lesser brew! Then, when the fraud's discovered, Scotland Yard is called to find the perpetrators and to hang them by the balls. A detective of a certain sort can discern what bottles hold. by looking at, in certain light, the subtle shades of gold. He'll need to know which revenue stamps are fraudulent or true. If the contents are suspicious he must taste them, wouldn't you? 'I'm thinking this is Jameson's, Not Macallan's malt so pure. but I'll take another glass or two to be absolutely sure.'

John F. McCullagh
The Crime Of Valentine

It was Love in the dock
at old Bailey this time.
It was Love stood accused
Of unspeakable crimes..

Some ladies had joined
in a class action suit.
It concerned breech of promise
and the theft of their youth.

The ladies bore witness
That Love pulled a fraud.
That those frogs weren’t Princes-
That Love is a baud.

Love’s sole defense
Was that Love was traduced
Who knew his young swains
Weren’t speaking the truth?

Love is known to be patient
and reputed as kind...
but men fear committment
to Ladies who whine.

Love's an old fashioned emotion, .
Like honor and truth-
Love was found guilty
of misleading our youth.

Henceforth candy hearts
Must bear warning labels
And show calorie counts
Along with the flavors.

Boxes of Roses
Must bear warnings too:
This Cad may talk sweet-
But he’s not into you.
John F. McCullagh
The Crown Of Thorns

The procurator came back home
    As dusk began to fall
His man slave helped him to disrobe
He took his meal alone.

He thought about the days events,
of Proculla’s premonition
about the Jewish rabbi
Whose death pleased the Sanhedrin.

He’d washed his hands
But were they clean?
He struggled to decide.
He thought about this Jesus
Whom he’d just had crucified.

He’d found no real fault in the man
 - just a holy fool.
Whom Caiaphas had wanted dead
and used him as the tool.

He’d had him scourged, as if just that
Would satisfy the crowd.
His men mocked Jesus with royal robes-
Woven a crown of thorns.

Next he gave the crowd a choice
To set this Rabbi free
But they preferred Barrabus
Nailing Jesus to a tree.

His chief Centurion arrived
From the place of execution
The rebel and two thieves had died
by Roman Crucifixion.

“I’ve brought you back the Crown of thorns
as a memento of the day “
but Pilate, looking horrified,
Ordered him away.

Notes

Procurator: official title of Pontius Pilate, Roman Governor for the Province of Judea

Proculla: Wife of Pontius Pilate. In the gospel of Matthew she had a dream concerning Jesus and asked her husband to spare his life

Caiaphas Chief Priest

Sanhedrin: a religious group in first century Judea.

John F. McCullagh
The Curse Of The Sphinx

I remember the night we made camp
There on the Sands outside Giza.
The desert air turned cool beneath the stars
As we coupled before the
jealous eyes of the Sphinx.

The Great Pyramid fairly shone
bathed in moonlight.
We thought we were being discreet,
That only the stars saw our pleasure
But the cold eyes of the sphinx saw us too
And she must have sworn a vendetta.

In the valley of the Kings
There was rumor of a tomb.
A tomb untouched by robbers' hands
My love, Selene, and I
Would enter and there behold.
The face of a pharaoh, a boy,
rendered forever in gold.

There must be some rational reason
For the cough Selene developed soon after.
Like some delicate flower she wilted.
Some virus had strangled her laughter

We didn't know then of the curse
How could we? we hadn't been told.
My darling Selene would soon die
And I, too, would never grow old.

John F. McCullagh
You know my face yet forget my name,
but then, it's for my roles I'm known.
I've spend a lifetime in the game.
Now, in the shadows, I am alone
I've lived perhaps a hundred lives-
on film, yet failed to live my own.
A stranger to my flesh and blood
whose children won't pick up the phone.
I remember that it used to ring
Back when my acting won acclaim.
For years the star was on my door,
I slept with starlets, drank Champagne.
Now my Cancer bites within
and I take pills to mask the pain.
There will be no more roles for me
Though I could make a passable Lear;
Hear me raving in the storm
but it's a waste with no Fool near.
For me there will be no happy ending.
Each painful breath is such a chore.
I won praise for my "authenticity"
But Love wound up on the cutting room floor.

John F. McCullagh
The Dancer

The picture hangs upon the wall of a slender woman, une eleve
She is eternally en pointe
a Student of great Nurerev.

With Martha Graham’s Corps de ballet
She’d danced (before the children came)
Performed a beautiful Glissade-
 enjoyed, for a while, a muted fame.

Light and shade proportionate
here catch her look of radiant joy
The dancer, ignorant of her fate,
seems more a heavenly envoy.

But you and I both know the rest-
The ravages of age and time
The sad result of little strokes
that slow the step and cloud the mind.

Here is her cane, her walker too
Their owner has succumbed to age
There will not be a pas de deux
Nor bouquets tossed upon the stage.

John F. McCullagh
The Dangers Of Smoking

She had been through so much,
Her right lung was removed.
Now six weeks into Chemo
My wife had not improved,
Despite the best care
That our coverage affords.
The cancer had spread
to her breast and lymph nodes.

My wife's been a smoker
Since she turned sixteen.
Through the years we were married
And the years in between.
Now though she gasped
Like a fish brought to shore.
Her long term addiction
Had her craving one more.

Who am I to judge her
Or deny her last wish.
She is not getting better,
I've no heart to resist.
Gave her the smokes
She had long put away
Gave her the lighter
Sought out her ash tray.

A tremendous explosion ripped
Through our first floor.
Indeed had proved fatal
Her request for one more.
Purpose or accident
Can't judge her intent
Choosing to smoke
Her oxygen tent.
The Day I Died

The air was close, but it would not rain
The day I died.
And smog enshrouded Gotham town
The day I died..

I should have stayed in Oceanside
The day I died.
Instead of a hellish subway ride
The day I died.

It started with a stabbing pain
The day I died.
Then waves of nausea deep inside
The day I died.

I fell to earth, I could not breathe
The day I died.
Co workers rushing to my side
The day I died.

Sirens scream on distant streets
The day I died.
bringing hosts of E.M.T.’s
The day I died..

Too late for me, this proud heart fails
The day I died.
I thought” This is the last of Earth”
The day I died.

John F. McCullagh
The Day She Left Us

I saw her just the other day, a most familiar sight.
The Lady in the Harbor, holding her torch alight.
At her feet a poet's words; some sentiments concerning Liberty:
a welcome to all immigrants yearning to breathe free.

These days we take a different tack, the welcome is withdrawn.
That Lady in the Harbor grows distant and forlorn.
The grand-kids of the immigrants she greeted in her day
Have hatched a plan designed to keep such Riff- Raff far away.

Then this morning I looked out and Liberty was gone,
Her place of honor empty: just her pediment of stone.
The Lady has returned to France; the reason? Sadly clear:
Liberty has figured out she's no longer welcome here.

John F. McCullagh
It was sticky hot and humid in Ferguson that Saturday. 
Just another weekend where the little leagues would play. 
I was riding unit 25 looking out for petty crime. 
My units radio sputtered to life: 'shots fired on Canfield drive.' 
'Officer in need of assistance'

We just didn't arrive in time.

I recognized the body, my colleague and close friend. 
Darren Wilson was shot six times, the last time in the head. 
His service piece was missing. The shooter had fled the scene. 
I called for a bus and backup and radioed what I had seen. 
We then secured the crime scene as it drew a silent crowd. 
Detectives looked for any clues and canvased the homes around. 
No witness would come forward, either out of fear or dread. 
'His new wife is now a widow.' my disgusted partner said. 
Darren's face was badly bruised as he lay there in the sun. 
I surmised he'd been assaulted in the struggle for his gun. 
The coroner sighed and shook his head at the body on the gurney. 
He'd perform an autopsy on my friend before his final journey.

The score was one dead man in blue, his murderer still free. 
The streets that night were quiet, as I suspected they would be. 
There was no public outcry at the killing that was done. 
Blue lives never matter in a town like Ferguson.

John F. McCullagh
The Day They Murdered Camelot

One afternoon in Dallas, Texas
November, Nineteen sixty three
A brace of shots were fired
That would enter history

With Jacqueline beside him
in the presidential Limousine
John Kennedy was waving
taking in the happy scene.

Coming out of Dealy plaza
They made the turn on Elm
No shots had yet been fired
The day was mild and warm.

From above, Oswald was waiting
In the book deposit loft
His rifle at the ready
His prey scoped and crossed.

"You can't say that they don't love you"
the governor's wife said
From behind a shot was fired
a scoped rifle spitting lead.

J.F.K. then clutched his throat
And John Connelly his side
A second bullet hit a curb
and ricocheted aside.

The third shot was the killing shot
bone and brain cells flying
The Marines had trained the sniper well
and Camelot was dying.
That afternoon in Dallas
As darkness was descending
Did he think about his children
as consciousness was ebbing?

“Make for Parkland Hospital”
The secret service screamed
they’d failed to save the president
But who had done the deed?

Walter Cronkite told the nation
that Camelot was dead.
L.B.J. on Air Force One
became the nation’s head.

Back on the Streets of Dallas
Oswald had killed again.
An officer named Tippit
Lay in the gutter, dead.

Oswald was apprehended
In a movie house nearby
They found his nest and rifle
What they never found was why...

A nation mourned its President
on his final Caisson ride
and watched his little boy salute
standing by his Mother's side.

John F. McCullagh
The Dead Girl

At first I didn’t see her, .
There, half hidden in the leaves.
In the early morning darkness
Nothings ever what it seems.

The leaves were wet and sticky
but not with morning dew.
The smell of blood assaulted me
Now what was I to do?

She must have been a jogger
on an early morning run.
-Was she the victim of a killer
or dead from a “Hit and run”?

Was someone, somewhere worried?
That she wasn’t back on time
I know that I would go insane
Were she a child of mine.
I checked around to see if 
There were clues upon the ground..
Just then a squad car passed by-
Frantically, I waved them down.

I couldn’t help the Cops much
-I had driven my wife to the train..
I’d dropped off my car for service
My mechanic will say the same.

I gave the cops my name and number
An ambulance was called.
They were told they need not hurry
-Just a removal to the morgue.

John F. McCullagh
The Death Of The Washington Madam

'A terrible waste of curves and curls'
he said as the knot was tightened
She struggled as he kicked the chair-
Was Halliburton frightened?

She was the Queen of pay for play
for D.C. Movers and Shakers
Who, judging by their tastes in sin,
Won’t be mistook for Quakers.

Her little black book (it won't be found)
Recorded details chilling
But keep your socks on, client nine
At least the sheep was willing.

"A terrible waste of a luscious mouth' 
He said- her tongue protruding
'They’d have had fun in jail with that,
The clientele you’re screwing.'

We'll 'suicide' as many 'Ho's
as it takes so this gets no higher.
Pay attention boys and girls-
This is our Reich stag fire

(I hated changing the first line to pass censorship
curves and curls was once T & A)

John F. McCullagh
The day was dry and hot,  
with not a breath of air.  
His uniform was loosely fit,  
The pinstripes, number 4.  
Lou Gehrig was the 'Iron Horse'  
but an iron horse no more.

ALS had robbed him of his strength,  
and now moved in for the kill.  
Most thought, at first, he would not speak.  
That he didn't have the skill.  
But all there remembered what he said  
And I think I always will.

He considered himself 'the Luckiest man'  
Despite the' bad break' he got.  
An immigrant's son who hit it big  
and shined in the spotlight.

Lou passed away within two years.  
The Stadium, too, is gone.  
We're not the Country we were then  
America has moved on.

But on this Independence Day  
I'll stand where Gehrig stood.  
There used to be a ballpark here  
and a hero kind and good.

John F. McCullagh
The Demagogue

He gives voice to your anger. 
His eloquence draws tears. 
Strange, he's not quite so loquacious when no Teleprompters near.

He's skillful at campaigning as he darts from place to place. 
He likes preaching to the choir, dissent he cannot face.

He organizes hatreds as most politicians do. 
He loves the Muslim Brotherhood and snubs Netanyahu.

The shade of Richard Nixon approves his covert deeds; 
Certain that a list of enemies is something every POTUS needs.

Now mid-term elections near And he once more tries his luck. 
With a win, he'll be dictator; with a loss, just a lame duck.

John F. McCullagh
The Devil Dogs

Through grain fields with bayonets fixed,
from Belleau Woods the Germans came.
The sixth Marines in shallow pits
unleashed a deadly metal rain.

The French collapsed upon the left
Their flank exposed by craven fear
The Marines held fast when urged to flee:
'Retreat?, Hell we just got here.'

By June the sixth, it fell to them
to take a Hill to save the French.
A German company with machine guns
waited for them well entrenched.

With tactics from another war
Audacious yes, but not too clever
'Come on, you bastards' Dan Daly roared,
'Do you really want to live forever'

With casualties high, so many dead
The Marine Corps held the hill by night.
Counter attacks were fended off
some times with fists and K bar knife.

Now the cannon of both sides
rained steel where the combatants stood:
A once beautiful preserve of princes
was turned into a shattered wood.

Through mustard gas and cannon fire
The Marines advanced into the Wood.
Silenced machine guns and cut bared wire
Till the enemy fled, this time for good.

Before the flag at Iwo flew,
Before the Canal's jungle squalor
Marines were nicknamed 'Devil Dogs'
by the Germans who admired valor.
John F. McCullagh
The Door Of No Return

There is a place on Goree isle-
It's call the house of slaves.
A port of call for slaver ships
whose crews no saint could save.
The captives of defeated tribes
here caught last sight of home.
Borne down by chains on
feet and wrists, crowded yet alone
All would pass one portal-
the door of no return.
Into the holds where many died
and more wished for the same.
They'd lose their language and their kin
and any hope of home.
They'd find a place beneath the loam
they'd work a lifetime long.
Stronger than the Indians
whites worked until they died
Their labors built a Country
in which they took little pride.
Yet they knew the day was coming,
in the year of Jubilee,
When the shackles would be stricken off
and once more they would be free,

John F. McCullagh
I walked this campus in my youth,
forty years ago today.
The air is sweet from recent rain
here on the quad lawn where we played.

It's changed, of course,
that building is new.
Jefferson Hall is next, they say.
I graduated here in May.
I need not give the year away
I 'll only say it was a time,
like now, of great uncertainty.

I remember you like yesterday,
Your eyes a deep cerulean blue.
Your long and flowing auburn hair.
Those bee stung lips so sweet and true.

On impulse, just then
I tried the door.
Surprised I was when it gave way
I entered in the Bursars room
and heard your voice just down the hall.

For sure, twas you.
I'd know that voice
if all the world should pass away
I made my way towards your voice
anticipating ecstasy.

A joyful union there awaits
to hold you once more in my arms
life beyond death to be united
with you so many years since gone.

I entered then into the room
in hopes that she I loved was there.
This was the place where we first met
a place where, sadly, none appeared.
A wistful smile, a final glance
from your poor poet of Romance.
too much a dreamer, most would say,
as I closed the door to yesterday

John F. McCullagh
The Dragon Coaster

Seated, secured, awaiting our ride;
Brave on the outside, frightened inside.
The old wooden coaster cranks and it creaks.
It lifts us towards heaven, pushed back in our seats.
The first drop, deceptive, elicits few cries
Then, at a gallop, we're hurled down from the sky.
Over and under we're shaken and stirred.
We regret having lunch but we don't say a word.
I'm glad you're beside me, my most faithful friend
The ride comes to a stop and we both say "Again!"

For its joys and terrors few rides can compete.
The Rye Dragon Coaster has seldom been beat.
Some are newer; some faster; if you wish you can try
Still, first Loves are special and must not be denied

John F. McCullagh
The Dressmaker

Her fingers are good, she can sew, she can thread.
She has time on her hands, now that her husband is dead.
Lillian Weber is past ninety nine,
she's on her last mission in a race against time.
She makes dresses for young girls that she'll never meet;
colorful frocks for the African heat.
Her goal is one thousand dresses, so fine,
by the day that she'll celebrate for the 100th time.

John F. McCullagh
The Droplet

I am but one droplet in the stream,
carried along by gravity,
which snakes toward the River Liffey
which then empties into the sea.

One droplet, chemically the same
as all my brothers in the tide.

Yet unique, I am myself.
distinct from others by my side.

What a crazy ride it’s been
over rocks and through the woods
passing through old Dublin town
flowing beneath the Ha’penny bridge.

Finally emptied into the sea
to join the sad eternal tide......

Perhaps the Sun will raise me up
to rain down on the countryside.

I’d not object to being rain
or to joining the Liffey once again.
by John F. McCullagh

John F. McCullagh
The Dullahan (The Dark Man)

He rides his black steed through the countryside and whenever he stops a mortal man dies.
He's the Angel of Death and worthy of dread; dressed all in black and lacking a head.
In his left hand is a spine that he'll use as a whip.
In his right hand a scythe that will cut to the quick.
If you chance to observe him you may be struck blind and still think yourself lucky that he left you behind.
If he pulls on the reins and he finds you outdoors your heart will stop dead and will beat nevermore.
There are buckets of blood where the Dullahan rides.
On all Hallows Eve you had best be inside.

John F. McCullagh
The Easter Rising

eiri amach na casca
(the Easter rising)

The Proclamation had met with silence,
he must have known the fight was lost,
But, Connolly, faithful to the Cause,
Was accepting of its cost.

They took the Green, The inns of Court,
the Post on Sackville Street
De Valera stood at Boland's mill
the place where five roads meet.

Their commander, Pearse, a scholar,
Apportioned his men's lives,
To garrison each strong point
Till the British would arrive.

Their tactics were pure suicide-
They could not hope to stand,
But their strategy was brilliant
Meant to rouse a sleeping land.

Sure to die of a snipers bullet-
Or a British firing squad
These unabashed Republicans
Held out against long odds..

Bloodied by the Rebel guns,
The foe paid dear for ground
The general post office was in flames
as their gunboats shelled our town.

The week crawled past and Dublin burned
The post Office glowed White hot
Pearse watched his troop dwindle and fade.
Faint from shell and shock..
They gave up to be crucified
In Imperial British fashion
And by dying saved their country.
Their deaths brought her resurrection.

The British with their firing squad
Could ready, aim and fire.
The Brotherhood by dying
Could persuade, convince, inspire

From the graves of these patriot men
Was an Irish nation grown.
Their struggle at the post office
Still captured in its stone.

John F. McCullagh
The Eleven

Their leader was incompetent,
well-meaning but untried.
He lead his men into a trap
Then fled and let them die.

The Indian and British troops
Were outnumbered by Khan's men
When their artillery was silenced
It was clear how it would end.

The soldiers of the Sixty Sixth
fought gallantly to the death.
When they turned to make their final stand
There were eleven left.

With sword and lance and cartridge
They battled hopeless odds.
On the dusty plain of Maiwand
They would, shortly, meet their God.

When their ammo was exhausted
They decided steel would do.
They charged then, in the face of death.
those men, so proud, too few.

When the last of them lay in the dust
having fought to their last breath.
The Khan himself paid them respect
For they had earned their rest..

John F. McCullagh
The Elgin Marbles

Lord Elgin of Britain, that perfidious thief,
robbed Greece of its heritage, its marble reliefs.
The Parthenon stripped of its decorative stone,
a victim of rapine stands forlorn and alone.
Phidias' statues, rendered so fine,
Are lifelike and glorious for now and all time.
The British museum houses the collection
Which Elgin purloined while avoiding detection.
Greece, more than most, has been robbed of its past
By ephemeral empires who thought they would last.
Now that the sun sets on the imperial throne
Isn't it time that those Marbles went home?

John F. McCullagh
The Empty Chair

an empty chair
that none will take..
A man in jail
for Freedom’s sake.

The honor of a Nobel prize
was viewed by China as offense-
They boycotted the Oslo fete
in honor of their dissident.

His wife is under house arrest
He is in his prison cell.
Why is China so afraid
Of what the prisoner might tell?

An empty chair
An unheard speech
A man imprisoned
For years, not weeks

An empty chair
An unheard plea
From one who’d rather
breathe air that’s free.

John F. McCullagh
The Empty Glass

I woke up before dawn with my eye whites bloody red.
The fierce pounding in my skull made me wish that I were dead.
My lips are cracked, my throat is parched, my mouth is desert dry.
I don't remember last night, no matter how I try.
I've woke up in a strangers room but know not where or why.

I had misplaced my childhood faith that I had gained through my baptism.
As a teen I seized on alcohol as my replacement ism.
There the spirit was available to all who had the price
and of course I never listened to anyone who gave advice.

I have slept at times in gutters when the weather wasn't cold.
I have peed on strangers lawns near taverns where my drug is sold.
I have gotten into fistfights, the kind that no one wins.
My family doesn't want a son who drinks and reeks of gin.

Today you find me seated in a church basement for a change.
I'll own up to my failings. A sponsorship will be arranged.
You see I've hit rock bottom and that will be my foundation
I hope my new friend Bill W. will lead me to salvation.

John F. McCullagh
The Empty Nest

The wind is raw, a sleet ing rain
Has covered everything in ice..
It coats an inch of killing snow.
Take it slow is good advice.

I clear my walkway of the slush
And pause to view my little tree
It is a dwarf non-fruiting Pear.
I had the City plant for me.

In its bare branches is a nest,
An impressive edifice of sticks
Abandoned now for sweeter climes
In Spring a nesting pair raised chicks.

I long to hear their call once more
They used to wake me at first light
But soon their chicks had taken flight
And all was silent as the night.

Do nesting pairs feel sadness when
Their little ones have fled the nest?
They never call, they cannot write.
I’m guessing that it’s hard, at best.

In spring will come another pair
to nest within my little tree.
Once more I’ll be awakened by
that timeless avian symphony.

John F. McCullagh
The Empty Tomb

In Arlington, where valor sleeps,
there is a marble Tomb
where heroes rest whose names are known
to God and God alone.

From Korea and the fields of France
Brought here to hallowed sleep
The unknowns of our nation's wars
Are honored with a wreath.

One body from the tomb is gone-
He served in Vietnam.
The mystery of identity
Found in a shard of bone

Rededicate his empty crypt
To the missing of that war-
To honor and keep faith with them
who never have come home.

John F. McCullagh
We the People have an enemy
But it isn't who you think:
It is not the Liberal Printers
with their paper and their ink.

It is not protestors in the street
Who wear pink p*ssy hats-
No, the enemy of the People
is not as obvious as that.

The enemy of the people
is no social media link.
He's not some homeless vagabond
adorned with tattoo ink.

He is the oaf who took an oath
To Preserve, Protect, Defend
The very basic liberties
He would subvert and suspend.

So if you seek the enemy
You vain and pompous ass
You will very likely find him
In a West Wing looking glass

John F. McCullagh
The Entertainer

He's paid his dues for far too long, singing other people's songs. For so long that he's forgotten the voice that was his own.

Now in crowded bars and seedy cafes he plays the tunes He knows will pay. His big break wasn't yesterday nor will it come tomorrow.

There he drinks alone, in silence, of the waters of regret. His old six stringed companion is the one true friend still left.

He Had a gift they used to say, and so he traveled to L.A. Here he's still singing 'Yesterday' with a genuine dash of sorrow.

John F. McCullagh
The Escape Of Billy The Kid

In an upper room they have me shackled.

Handcuffed, abused and under guard.

Pat Garrett’s off collecting taxes

This might be my chance, dear Lord.

Bob Olinger would love to kill me

He’s waved his shotgun in my face.

James Bell, the other guard, is softer,

He’s here to keep Bob in his place.

At noon I had the chance I wanted.

Olinger lunched across the street.

Bell was left alone to guard me-

a handcuffed man with shackled feet.

I told Bell I felt nature calling.

He took me on a Privy run

He was quick but I was quicker
We struggled and I got his gun

I pistol whipped my former guard.

I took his keys and freed my hands.

I didn’t want to kill him but,

I had to just because he ran.

That gunshot stirred the sleepy town

Olinger ran from across the street

I killed him then with his own shotgun

He needed killing, I’ll lose no sleep.

No lawman left in Lincoln town

I made the blacksmith break my chains

I saw Bell’s horse before the courthouse

I saddled up and took the reins.

No one made a move to stop me

As I rode out away from town

The rope they had to hang me waits

another’s neck to slip around.
Notes: This describes the events of 04/28/1881 at the Lincoln County Courthouse

John F. McCullagh
The Eternal Question

THE ETERNAL QUESTION

She was just a child, really,
A girl of sixteen,
when Stanford White took her
in a champagne fueled dream.

White was an architect of great renown,
He had designed the Garden at Madison Square.
He had designs on this chorus girl now,
whose raven haired beauty drew many men’s stares.

He had dined her and wined her
They had toasts with Champagne
On a red velvet swing
In his quarters they played.

In a room full of mirrors
A virgin lay down
When she awoke the next morning
No virgin was found.

It was Evelyn Nesbit’s fate
To be seen as a pawn or a prize.
Harry Thaw sought her in marriage
To take her from a man he despised.

Stanford White was wealthy, urbane,
and had his pick of life’s pleasures
Harry K Thaw was a wastrel and strange,
living off of his Father’s massed treasures.
White and Thaw had competed
for Evelyn’s affections.
White won, then soon lost interest.
Poor Evelyn lost his protection.

Thaw was an addict and deviant
He injected himself with cocaine.
He enjoyed whipping girls and sometimes young boys
with his riding whip or his cane.

He’d pursued Evelyn Nesbit for years
She’d denied all of his advances
Then her forced her and whipped her and beat her
It was one of life’s stranger romances.

He soon learned that the girl he had married
was no demure and virginal bride.
He learned that his rival, Stanford White
had, once more, plucked his pride.

Harry Thaw was then possessed
by a paranoid Jealous rage
Stanford White was a dead man
if it could be arranged.

Thaw, that summer, found his chance
At the roof Garden of Madison Square
Stanford White was in attendance
Thaw and Nesbitt were also there.

Thaw wore a long black overcoat
Strange dress for a day in June
The chorus girls were singing out
when three shots disturbed the tune.

Harry Thaw had murdered White:
three shots at point blank range.
The crowd, in shock, did nothing
as the murderer fled the stage.

Harry Thaw was placed on trial.
The Trial of the century
His lawyers built a strong defense
Based on an insanity plea...
In exchange for a promised divorce
And a specified sum of cash
Evelyn Nesbit was persuaded
to testify on Thaw’s behalf.
She told of the red velvet Swing
and about the mirrored room.
The Jury ruled insanity
Harry Thaw would be free soon.

After the Divorce, Thaw cut her off.
No cash was ever paid
She went on to a brief career
in movies and on stage..

Thaw died of a heart attack
In Nineteen Forty Nine.
Evelyn died in a Nursing Home
in Ronald Reagan’s time.

White’s Square Garden was demolished
Now moved to Seventh Avenue
It’s in its fourth incarnation
as the World’s most famous venue.

In the forum of the Garden
A golden Statute is in place.
With the body of a huntress
But with Evelyn Nesbit’s face

John F. McCullagh
The Fall Of The Republic

In the streets, broad and narrow, of Republican Rome, when Cicero, togate, called the Forum his home, there was sly innuendo and sarcastic wit. Court was quite entertaining with those advocates.

In the Senate, gridlock was rampant those days the Boni, content with conservative ways, Would block legislation and seek to destroy The populist leaders who held mobs enthralled.

The realm grew too large, the Republic too small, And Civil War was declared and great Pompey did fall. Then Caesar was slain and violence started anew and the laws became silent as often they do.

Exhausted, at last, many principals slain, Caesar Augustus the power reclaimed. There still was a Senate in Empire Rome But form is not substance, the Republic was gone.

Now Rome had an emperor to worship and fear. Change happened quickly, the fruits of despair, When the dust had all settled a Monarch ruled there.

John F. McCullagh
The Falling Man, A Poem Of 9-11

You see me suspended in space-time
as I’m passing the 89th floor
Falling headlong, my form is impressive.
Sadly, no one will be holding up scores.
Just moments ago I was standing
at a Morton’s Fork in the road:
The fires of hell were advancing
where I stood on the 98th Floor.
Well can you imagine my terror
when I came face to face with the flames.
I don’t know why I chose as I did;
Souls in torment can never explain.
My choice, which was no “choice” at all
was to smash through the window and fall.
Then the only thing that could “save” me
was the camera that captured it all

John F. McCullagh
The Family Portrait

The Tsar sat quiet and composed
His hands folded on his thigh
Around him were his daughters,
Four beauties with dark eyes
His faithful wife beside him
Posed regal and serene
Their little boy, Alexi,
kneeling there beside the Queen.

How different five years later
At their fatal, final scene
The Czar and the Czarina
Sat beside the heir, it seems.

The four girls were behind them
The maids and doctor too
All roused from sleep near midnight
by a rough and motley crew.

The White Russians were in battle
Outside the little town
They sought to save the family
Abdicated from the crown.

Lenin’s men would take no chances.
"They all must die tonight!"
We brought them to the basement
and arranged them left to right.

The family asked no questions
It seemed they guessed their fate
There were no pleas or crying
The girls stood proud and straight.

I heard the pistols firing
Some screams borne of despair
The heir was stirring weakly
Three more shots splintered his chair.
The thugs checked for survivors
And none was to be found
Their blood flowed like a river
upon the thirsty ground.

We placed the bodies in a wagon
And took them to an nearby mine
We doused them all with Gasoline
We didn’t want them found.

The Royal corpses burned fiercely
Dynamite was brought from town
Explosions sealed their resting place
It would be years before they’re found.

John F. McCullagh
The Ferryman

Dark draped the Ferry in confusion
on its final, fatal night.
Survivors spoke of a collision.
They knew that something wasn’t right.
A class of students on a trip
Bound for Jeju from Incheon
The Ferryman said to stay below
but he debarked and they’re all gone.
The ferry Sewol began to list
and water poured in through her ports.
Will anyone present forget the screams?
Souls in torment fill their thoughts.
Search and rescue soon became
a sad and grim recovery.
Their final moments were caught on cellphones
recovered from the silted sea.
The Ferryman has much to answer
About those students left behind
Perhaps in dreams he will be haunted
as young drowned faces flood his mind.

John F. McCullagh
The Final Parting

She stood with her sister by the edge of the sea.
The song the surf sang was of eternity.
She thought back to the times they had come here before;
as children, with their mother here down at the shore.
The cry of a gull made her look to the sky
and the thought of their mother brought a tear to her eye.
She held in her arms the urn filled with ash,
Here to honor the wish Mom had made in the past.
She knelt in wet sand at the edge of the shore
And the cremains were scattered on the foam evermore.
The leaden low cloud cover then yielded to the sun;
The warmth dried her tears and she felt overcome.
Never more would she enter her mother's embrace;
Never more hear her voice or behold her kind face.
Sister offered a hand and she favored one knee,
as the waves took her offering into the sea.
The sea roared its blessing, but all she heard there
were only the echoes of her unanswered prayers.

John F. McCullagh
The Final Round

Once he floated; now he stumbles, he struggles for each breath.
It's like the rumble in the jungle but Ali has little left.
His opponent is relentless, stalking him around the ring.
Is it Liston? Is it Foreman? Who has come to box the king?
Judging from the foe's ferocity - is the specter Smoking Joe?
Ali does his best to counter his opponent's crushing blows.
His eyes are nearly swollen shut, but the boxer never cries.
Who thought that Death would come for him in this macabre disguise?
He tries to dance but falters; feeling weakness in his knees.
He feels the K.O. coming as he's succumbing by degrees.
Ali tumbles to the canvas, he hears the count begin.
but when you fight a bout with Death you never hear the "Ten".

John F. McCullagh
Operation Meetinghouse was launched and underway,
Each Superfortress stripped of all but tail guns for the day.
We came in fast; we came in low, let darkness shield our flight.
Within our bays the bomblets lay to set the Nips alight.

I heard them at a distance, a large incoming flight,
Inexorable and frightening; like Death approaching Life.
I awakened my old mother, took my small child by the hand.
I fled down towards the river, as the first bombs shook the land.

The night was clear and windy and our bombers cut a swathe
of death, fire and destruction through their capital that night.
Their homes of wood and paper were quickly set alight.
We could smell the people burning. We flew so low that night.

Shitamachi was on fire and the high winds helped them spread.
The fire crews were overwhelmed and quickly joined the dead.
The thick smoke made it hard to breathe, old mother couldn't stand.
The horrors that we saw that night were like tales of the dammed.

Our fuselage of silver reflects their dying light.
Our losses are acceptable; few planes are lost this night.
Flying in formation, we bank right and turn to go
The skyline of the city flickers with a hellish glow.

I walk the ruined streets of home in dawn's uncertain light.
I hold my small child by the hand, old mother died last night.
We have no home, nowhere to go, I stare in helpless shock
At charred cars and blackened corpses on what used to be our block.

The General is ecstatic and enjoying his cigar;
our losses few, their suffering great, the fortunes of the war.
Tokyo lies in ruins from the fires set that night
How fortunate God is on our side and we are always right.

John F. McCullagh
The First To Die

In her majesties prison hospital
The patient slipped in to a coma.
For two months he had led a fast
in solidarity with his brothers.

The men of ‘H’ block wouldn't don
Such clothes as thieves might wear
They were men of the Provo I.R.A.;
Politics put them there.

They dressed in sheets and blankets
When denied their clothes to wear
In this time of the "Troubles"
they "Blanket boys" prepared.

No warders food would they accept.
No uniforms would they wear.
The world was focused on Long Kesh
and the brave lads dying there.

Bobby Sands was comatose;
His breathing shallow; his pulse was weak
This Catholic son of Antrim
Nevermore would speak

Just Twenty Seven years of age
As he slipped into the past
Bobby Sands was the first to die,
But he wouldn't be the last.

John F. McCullagh
The First* Christmas Tree

It was on this day in Thirty one,
That our City got this present;
A Douglas fir, nearly 20 feet,
in Rockefeller Center.
Just simple workmen giving thanks-
Not a single one percenter!

There was just a hint of tinsel
and no lights upon that tree.
Tiffany did not mold Glass stars
for common folks to see.
On that Inauguration day
No speeches certainly.

The stand was simply two by fours
Formed in a simple cross
The Evergreen a symbol
of Everlasting life, of course.
A tiny hint of sacred
amidst Secularity.

Those were dark days in our nation
with so many in distress.
Was it faith or Optimism
The workers were trying to express?
Perhaps they are one and the same
Just in a different dress.

Tonight we light a grander tree
And the mayor makes a speech.
These are days when a better life
seems just beyond our reach.
No longer called a Christmas tree,
Divorced now from that Faith
I feel like something precious died
And we’re left with just the Wraith.

John F. McCullagh
The Flowers In Your Hair

I remember the flowers you wore in your hair
when you were my bride at nineteen.
Their bright colors kept all the dark clouds at bay
Or at least so it seemed then to me.

And their fragrance so rare drove some boys to despair
on the day that you married with me.
Your sweet song of youth left no need for a proof
Of how happy together we’d be.

I remember the flowers you held in your hands
On our tenth anniversary day;
Their bright colors kept all the dark clouds at bay
Or at least so it seemed then to me.

And their fragrance so rare drove some men to despair
to think that your hand wasn’t free.
The red blush of your lips as you turned for a kiss
Said no man was more happy than me.

I remember the rosary they placed in your hands
On the day that Death took you, I keened.
It seemed but a moment since you were my bride
And I was a groom of nineteen

All the flowers so rare that they piled on you bier
Both my sisters said they were lovely
I scarcely saw colors with eyes filled with tears
And the blooms held no fragrance for me.

I tend now the flowers that grow by your stone
Their fragrance reminds me of you.
I long for the day the Lord calls me away
And I’ll be reunited with you

John F. McCullagh
The Fork In The Road

The room was dark at midday when Yogi breathed his last.  
His brain, now starved for oxygen, went searching through his past.  
Did he recall the shores of France back when he was nineteen?  
Or think upon those rings he’d won with those great 50’s teams?  
Dying, his mind searched frantically, jumping from place to place  
Here was Larsen’s perfect game where he jumped and they embraced.  
There was that heated argument when Robinson stole home.  
Then the pain and anger when Steinbrenner sent him home.  
Yet as these memories dissolved within his dying mind,  
He finally found the peace he sought; his Carmen, good and kind.  
He took her hand and they embraced on the shore of a moonlit sea.  
Yogi’s gone. Now the future isn’t what it used to be.

John F. McCullagh
The Future Of Social Security?

“The trust fund, Men, is nearly spent. The well is running dry”
“What will we tell the peasants who expect pie in the sky? ”

“We must find a hero to restore tranquility-
“Someone who’s a flim flam man to the nth degree.”

With Obama much too busy to calm the masses now.
They bailed Bernie Madoff out to milk the sacred cow.

The checks went out as usual
Folks took them to the bank.
By noon the checks began to bounce which made the markets tank.

Riots and disturbances-
Grey Panthers roam the streets.
While somewhere Charlie Ponzi smiles Secure in his conceit..

John F. McCullagh
The Game Of Baseball

It begins, of course, in the Spring.
The evenings grow lighter
The air sweeter
and all the world is filled
With sweet optimism.

It continues through
the long hot summer
Humid evenings
and long hot afternoons.
It is a marathon
not a sprint.
Only one team each year
wins that last game

It leaves us in the Fall
as Winter’s first foul
Imprecations
chill us to the marrow.
Days darken
and the sun seems absent.

It is both a faith and
a fixation.
Even in winter’s depths
It speaks to us of spring
and the hope
of redemption.

John F. McCullagh
The Geminoid

The scientist was first on stage,
Then came his Geminoid.
The family resemblance-
impossible to avoid.
An android in his image,
That seems to understand.
A body that is ageless
in the shape and form of man.
An android body could survive
The void of outer space
without the need for oxygen
Or food that looks like paste.
Manufactured Hominids
Could roam the plains of Mars
Explore the nearby cosmos,
Travel to a nearby star.
Then when, at last, they journey back
to Earth, their cosmic home,
will they embrace their distant kin
or find they are alone?

John F. McCullagh
The Ghost Of Richard The Third

The Ghost of Richard the Third

How bitter it was to be bereft
of Crown and life
in self same breath.
Bitter it was to fall and die
while disloyal Stanley stood idly by.
The arrow lodged close by my spine
as I was pole axed from behind.
A King of England, doubly dead,
stripped naked, on an ass was led.
In Leicester's graveyard I was lain-
The anointed monarch they had slain.
To lie forever in this hole
while Henry wore the crown he stole.
My Queen, my son, both predeceased,
were nobly interred and rest in Peace.
While I, Richard, ignobly lie
near Bosworth field with Greyfriars by.

John F. McCullagh
The Ghost Of Tower Two

The piled debris had been removed
The smell of death was gone
The first time she appeared to me
one cool September morn

Translucent and ethereal, to my disbelieving eye
Like many a wingless angel who’d tried and failed to fly
Whatever was she doing here, why now and not before
peering in my window on the forty second floor.

I felt a chill – a sense of dread I’d never felt before
My superstitious peasant brain was coming to the fore.
And yet I sensed no threat of doom, no anger out of you
floating there before me, the ghost of tower two.

There was sadness in your eyes for all you had foregone
Deprived of youth and love and life—all vanished now and gone
As morning light began to glow you faded from my view
But I will not forget you soon, the ghost of tower two.

Perhaps she’s seeking closure, the discovery of a bone
Or has unfinished business that keeps her here alone
Or maybe we’ve forgotten them—what we promised not to do
And deserve now to be haunted by the ghost of tower two.

John F. McCullagh
The Ghost Patrol

Their names will not be on the Wall.
It’s of the ghost patrol I sing.
Veterans of an unloved war.
Men from the age of Kennedy and King.
They’re dying now by their own hand,
by opioids or shotgun shell.
Some are dying by the glass-
As alcohol kills just as well.
They are victims of their memories,
deprived of sleep that will not come.
Post-traumatic stress some claim
Is the reason they have come undone.
See them sleeping on the streets-
a half drunk bottle in their hand.
The members of the ghost Patrol,
the pitiable legion of the damned.

John F. McCullagh
The Gift

To a family that had nothing a wondrous gift was given:
A free home with a garden! they moved in and started living.
There new home had an orchard a stream and a modern well.
Their benefactor, name unknown, gave a paradise to dwell.

It's sad to see that place today, the garden overgrown.
The water scarcely fit to drink, the structure falling down
They picked all the low lying fruit and they befouled their nest.
They thought they were entitled, they forgot they were but guests.

If the benefactor returns one day and sees his former home
He'll weep for Adam's children and be crying all alone.

John F. McCullagh
The Gift By A Donor

Perhaps I’ll save a life today,
-and help a child in pain.
-and give a cancer patient hope,
when hope is on the wane.

When I roll up my sleeve today
And watch my life’s blood flow-
I never know the faces or names
To whom my gift will go.

My hope is the recipients,
Their crises safely past,
Will recall this gift I gave-
This day was not their last.

I don’t look the heroic type-
A faceless friend to you-
But I stand tallest when I lie
upon a cot of blue.

John F. McCullagh
The Girl At The Fair

The day was clear, a touch too hot. Summer’s end was drawing near. Sidewalks vendors were making their pitches, selling their artisanal wares. That was when I saw my girl, a vision in a pale green dress. Blood red lips, a fair complexion and long black tresses framed her face. Where and when could it have been that I had seen her like before? Thought took me back to Hunter Mountain, late in the summer of Seventy four. Back then I saw one just like this, a beauty with a special grace With blood red lips and fair complexion and long dark hair that framed her face. She wore the tartan of her clan as she competed in the dance. Pipers played and tenors sang; it was the substance of romance. A rare beauty, ripe for taking, if one was brave enough to chance.... The memory was broken then, my daughter touched me on the arm. “There you are Dad, where have you been? I was sent to look for you by Mom.” We had lingered at the fair, wandering separately among the stalls. It’s Time now to sit down to our meal and share good wine as darkness falls.

John F. McCullagh
The God Of Doubt

A Roman, noble and Patrician,
Moved his Legions into position.    
The morning Sun was in their eyes
As they advanced upon Cannae. 
The Day was hot, they lacked hydration
As they fought this battle of annihilation. 
The hot winds swept dust in their eyes
As they advanced upon Cannae. 
Hannibal troops seemed to retreat,
The Legions were in hot pursuit. 
The Carthaginians moved to surround
The Romans on the killing ground. 
Eighty thousand Roman dead,
Mars’ thirst quenched by the blood they shed
Their arms and armor cast aside
Upon the fields around Cannae. 
Fortuna always smiled on Rome
Before this battle at Cannae 
Rome’s Senators refused to yield
though their Sons lay dead upon the field. 
In the Pantheon of gods
Echo prayers from the devout
To a new god born of that rout. 
Some say it is the god of doubt.

John F. McCullagh
The Good Thief

We die each night,  
to sleep succumb.  
Perhaps to dream,  
remembering none.  
Yet as we wait for  
sleep to come,  
we believe  
we'll see  
the morning sun.  
Ten thousand million  
days saw dawn  
before the day  
when I was born.  
Ten thousand million  
nights might end  
er e ever I see home again.  
If Being sees  
in me no worth  
perhaps this is  
the last of Earth.  
But as the Son  
for mercy, dies.  
Perhaps this good thief  
too may rise.

John F. McCullagh
The Goose Who Loved Golf

On the flight path down from Quebec in the recent past, they say,
The lead goose saw a foursome on the fairway, hard at play.

Their clothing was intriguing
Bright Argyles and Staid plaids
Little lackeys followed them, carrying their bags.

The goose brigade lost interest in proceeding South that day.
Instead they landed on the course intent on watching play.

The lead Goose now spent all his time
At Bethpage, on the Black,
and honked golf commentary to all his fledgling flock.

This lead Goose was the First, brave Avian pioneer,
who broke the pattern going South instead he wintered here.

The Geese are protected by the law, so we have no recourse.
We can't hunt down these honkers who are greasing up the course.

Within one human lifetime- a revolutionary change.
the geese have all stopped flying South They're students of the game.

John F. McCullagh
The Great Fire Of Rome

July eighteenth in 64’
Of the Common Era
Play Nero, play upon the lyre
While Rome Is fed into the fire

At the Circus near the Palatine
in some shops began the fire
You looked on impassively
And played upon your lyre

You sang about” The Sack of Troy”
The Trojans funeral pyre
While portions of your palace
Were themselves consumed by fire

Three Quarters of the city gone
The fire raged for days
Casualties kept mounting
as the Romans fought the flames.

You blamed the Christians for the deed
The lions lunched for days
You built yourself the house of gold
Upon the pauper's graves

John F. McCullagh
The Grimsby Chums

From their farms and their villages, they answered the call;
of King and Country, to the great game of war.
They drilled and they practiced to work as a team,
then were shipped to the Somme, July, 1916.

A film of their training was made to be shown
to their sisters and mothers and lovers back home.
It was screened one time only, to standing acclaim
by the unwitting widows who carried their names.

Like ripe wheat at the harvest felled by the scythe,
the chums led the assault and half paid with their life.
Lincolnshire wept when the casualties were read.
That first day at the Somme saw twenty Thousand dead.

Those that returned to their village or farm
Thereafter oft woke from their sleep in alarm.
They were changed men and broken, who returned from the fray,
And who bore their survivor guilt to their own dying day.

John F. McCullagh
The Gropes Of Wrath

The old lady at the terminal
had seen this show before.
Travellers removing shoes
but the TSA wants more.

Full body X-ray scans
that reveal you in the nude.
Refusal gives them cause to grope,
with hands and manners rude.

Some incontinent old lady
had had her diaper snatched.
A Veteran with a metal leg
had it forcibly detached.

Our heroine was quite nonplussed
when the matron grabbed her bra
but when she groped for Venus' mons
she felt they'd gone too far.

She reached a gave the matron's breast
a firm and gentle twist.
Twas nothing much compared to what
she'd suffered before this.

Our traveller rests in jail tonight,
uncertain of her fate.
Zero tolerance for amateurs
from those thugs that man the gate.

John F. McCullagh
The Hacker Next Door

I say always play nice with the neighbors, don't rile them up or make them sore
But my wife, (who's a bit of a hot head), went to war with the people next door.
The &quot;causas belli&quot; are murky, the results of the skirmish unclear
But the fellow next door is a hacker; now me and the wife live in fear.
We have every modern convenience; programmable gadgets galore.
But your password should never be &quot;password&quot; when fighting the hacker next door.
Our motorized shades were ascending as the missus was trying to dress.
&quot;Alexa&quot; just called her a &quot;fat Cow&quot;—who programmed that is easy to guess.
In the depth of the winter we're freezing As our AC is in his control.
When we shower the temperature varies. Its either too hot or too cold.
We spent thousands on home automation. But now we are riddled with doubt.
We tried for a truce, but, alas, it's no use. Now we're paying to tear it all out!

John F. McCullagh
The Halloween Song- Parody

Dead leaves smoking on an open fire,
Tricksters dressed up in odd clothes.
Ghouls and Goblins sneaking up on our porch-
Give them chocolate and maybe then they'll go.

Everybody knows the jack-o- lanterns wick-ed light
Means it's a pagan sort of Gourd.
Tiny tykes, munching sugar all night,
will wind up bouncing off the walls.

They know Brunhilda's on her way
trying out her new broom on her special day.
And every little goblin's gonna try
To see if chubby Witches still can fly.

And so I'm offering this simple phrase
Since trick or treat I think is overused.
Although it's been said it's the day of the dead;
Happy Halloween to you.

John F. McCullagh
The Hand She Was Dealt

The onset was a subtle thing;  
a clumsiness, a loss of grace.  
She who had been strong and proud  
was, suddenly, listless, out of place.  
A weakness in a muscle here.  
A spasm in a tendon there.  
The prognosis, like a hammer strike  
to the unsuspecting steer.

First came the cane,  
Then came the chair.  
Long before them  
Came the fear.  
The loss of strength  
And motor skill  
Lou Gehrig’s illness  
left just her will.  
Yet with that will she loved her man  
Wrote a book with just one hand  
Saw as much of the world she wished,  
left them wanting one last kiss.  
Then, when breathing became a chore,  
She didn’t do it anymore.  
To be surprised by death, she felt  
Was the best way to manage  
The hand she was dealt.

John F. McCullagh
The Hanging Tree

His calloused hands caressed the wood that, shortly, he would plane. The carpenter was on his knees examining the grain. The Romans wanted cross beams and the carpenter knew why: Upon this tree the rebel, Jesus, would be crucified.

He’d never heard the rabbi speak to the admiring crowds. He thought himself too practical to go in search of God. In the temple he made sacrifice; he conformed and he complied. He’d seen too many mad for God and noted how they’d died.

The carpenter thought it was a shame; this wood too good you see. It’s a tragic waste of good timber to make a hanging tree. Still the money came in handy as good wine was still not free. Galled wine would be served in a sponge to this man from Galilee.

The crowd called for Barabbas when this Jesus was condemned. He shuddered as he thought of the cruel way this life would end. There is no dignity he could see in a death upon a cross; mocked by the onlookers while his women wailed his loss.

The Roman paid him coin and slaves bore the beam away. The sad procession passed his shop later that same day. The Rabbi wore a crown of thorns, fashioned from the jujube, and there, upon his shoulders. He bore the hanging tree.

John F. McCullagh
The Highway Of Exce$$

I'm just another failure
on the Highway of excess.
My children disrespect me,
and my wife is unimpressed.

These days a hundred thou$and
doesn't get you very far.
I'm wearing last year's wardrobe
and I drive a pre-owned car.

My son's friends drive Mercedes
that their Daddy's dollars bought.
I bought my son a Nano.
Its an Indian import.

I've got two kids in College
with tuition payments due.
Each year their teachers revise texts
And make you buy them new.

I dread the thirteenth of each month
When charge card bills arrive
They follow up with phone calls
To make sure I'm still alive.

I stimulate the economy
With cash I don't possess
I'm like Barrack Obama
On the highway of excess.

John F. McCullagh
The Homecoming

His flight was due in late that night
So to the base she came.
The guard gave her admission-
she was on his list of names.

The group gathered in Reception
was, mostly, silent and restrained.
There were mothers with small babies,
Older couples, frail and pained..

She thought she recognized one girl
Whose husband served with James.
She wasn't sure she could recall
the younger woman's name.

Like some modern Penelope
She'd spent her years alone.
Waiting very anxiously
for her Odysseus to come home.
But not like this, not in a box
Dismembered, dead and done.
She'd hoped to feel his warm embrace
preferably more than one.

A mosaic of Americans
Of every race and creed
All waiting for their soldiers
Who had volunteered to bleed.

The next days were a blur to her,
Not memories to save.
A folded flag for her to hold
and prayers beside his grave

John F. McCullagh
The Homecoming Of Alex Bonneyman U.S.M.C.

My mother was a little girl when the Western Union man
Put the dreaded telegram in my grandmother’s hand.
It said that my grandfather would not be coming home.
It told her that she’d have to raise my mother all alone.
Grandfather was honored, in death, for his service overseas;
the Medal of Honor, we still have, awarded posthumously.

We thought that his remains were lost, committed to the sea.
Just one of many thousands who have died to keep us free.
Then recently, I traveled to the island where he died;
A mass grave had been discovered with some brave marines inside.
They found a tattered uniform that dressed grandfather’s bones.
Emotion overwhelmed me as I thought: “He’s coming home.”
In Sante Fe, New Mexico he’ll rest with all his kin.
Guns will fire in salute; they’ll fold a flag for him.
They’ll place it in my mother’s hands; his little girl grown old,
For her hero who died long ago on the Betio atoll.

John F. McCullagh
The Hourglass

Life is so precious
for look how we cling to it,
enduring all manner
of outrage from fate.

We soldier on
with spirit indomitable.
when life puts a little
Too much on our plate.

Our days are uncertain
Our term here is limited.
We waste precious hours
passive, asleep.

Time keeps its own pace
and its laws are immutable
It refuses to bargain,
no matter how much we weep.

Time, which costs nothing,
yet more precious than diamonds
We've no means to save it
for time will not keep.

John F. McCullagh
The Incident On King Street

The air was chill and darkness fell as bells rang and the rabble gathered.
A British sentry had struck a lad; some said his jaw was shattered.
Some four hundred Bostonians were milling about his station.
Eight Redcoats, each with rifle cocked, tried to defuse the situation.
The crowd was in an ugly mood; they would not let this slide.
The soldiers were pelted with rocks and snow, but as yet no one had died.
Private Montgomery was knocked down And muttered &quot;Damn you, Fire.&quot;
He discharged his weapon into the ground, and that shot provoked their ire.
Captain Preston never issued the command, but a ragged volley was fired.
Eleven colonists were hit, three of them expired.
The crowd in panic then dispersed, and the troop of men retired.
A black man, Crispus Atticus, was among those who had died.
The mood was tense in Boston and those troops were charged and tried.
John Adams won acquittal, he was brilliant in defense.
But the crowd still felt injustice, from then on there's been no peace.

John F. McCullagh
The great man lies dead in his bullet riddled clothes.
The ambush was more successful than De Valera dared suppose.
Michael Collins was a traitor to Republican ideals.
His treaty gave over to the Brits one fourth of our green fields.
Everyone thought me his friend. I was always by his side.
Yet I knew enough to stay away on this day he died.
When he fired on the Inns of Court I decided he'd go down..
Though some may say he was a Saint, once safely in the ground.
They say that he fought bravely, though surrounded with long odds.
A proper, fitting sacrifice to lay before our gods.
Nations must be born in blood if they are ever to be free.
Free of allegiance to a Crown and capped with Liberty

John F. McCullagh
The Inheritance

“She cannot live forever! ”
We told each other more than once.
Still, she had all the Deutschmarks
and to her I was a dunce..

My wife and I were servant/slaves
to her every wish and whim.
It was just after the Armistice
that she ”allowed” us move in.
Germany was a hungry place
As Weimar came into being
What happened after Wilhelm fled,
few could claim to have foreseen.

No, she never spoiled us,
her grandson and his mate.
I cut wood, my wife drew water
For that shriveled old ingrate.
Other than a pittance
and an attic bed of straw
she gave neither thanks nor praise
to her only heirs at law.

Thank Gott, the morning finally dawned
we didn’t hear her ring her bell.
In sleep she had departed
to Heaven or, likely, Hell.

We hugged each other gleefully.
Our servitude was done.
We were rich with Deutschmarks!
The year was Nineteen twenty one.

John F. McCullagh
The Judas Kiss

A simple kiss upon your cheek,
A gentle, loving kiss.
Not amorous or passionate,
Not connoting love remiss.
Thirty years ago
we were an 'item' as they say.
I broke your heart
with my callousness
when, hurtfully, I strayed
I'm not proud that I hurt you.
Sad that it comes to this-
To kiss you like a stranger
feels like the Judas Kiss.

John F. McCullagh
The Juggler Of God

Back in the age of faith
when most lived in homes of sod
There lived a humble man
They called the juggler of God.

He was just a simple juggler
He could not read or write.
He performed his simple tricks
for children's laughter and delight.

In return for food and shelter-
for he had little use for gold-
He travelled from town to town
until he at last grew old.

When arthritis swelled his joints
He grew stooped, his fingers cold
When at last his gifts had failed him
He turned attention to his soul.

In the order of Saint Benedict
The kind Abbot gave him place
Though he barely knew the prayers
His simple mind was full of grace.

In the chapel of Our Lady
The Juggler prayed there in the Aisle
Bemoaning his inability
to entertain the holy child.

He felt warmth in his fingers
A quick release from pain
He reached into his leather sack
for the objects of his trade.

There before the altar
The brother juggled for the Lord
It was to be his last performance
with a heavenly reward.
Back in the age of faith
when most lived in homes of sod
There lived a humble man
They called the juggler of God.

John F. McCullagh
The Last Alarm: 9-11-01

Were you climbing up the stairs when you heard the last alarm?
Whispering a desperate prayer to somehow keep you safe from harm?
When the towers were collapsing and that debt all owe came due,
Were you proud of your life choices as they passed in quick review?

Sometimes, late at night, when dreams, not nightmares, come
I'll awaken with a start from sleep and once more speak your name.
Sadly, these days you're nothing but a picture in a frame,
For your last alarm has sounded; a death knell for my son.

It is hard to keep on living when the boy I loved has gone;
to face grey days of emptiness when Life has lost its charm.
The job you had to do that day, you did with grace and calm,
You were just a wingless angel rising to the last alarm.

John F. McCullagh
The bearded man in the forager’s cap rode in on little sorrel that night. Lee had called a council of war to game plan for the coming fight. The Northern aggressors were on the move but they might be vulnerable on their right. It was a bold audacious plan to divide in the face of the foe. The Calvary screen was key to the scheme to find where best to strike the blow. The battle would be called Lee’s masterpiece; Hooker’s men broke and they fled. but the battle would also be Jackson’s last; in just a few days he’d be dead.. In the dark of May second, men rode the plank road, Jackson rode at their head Did they ignore the Sentry’s challenge? Or did the sentry mishear what they said? They took Jackson arm, the saw-blade did sing, but alas it was to no avail He crossed over the river to rest neath the shade of the trees in the hero’s vale

John F. McCullagh
The Last Dance

He’d offered her his hand to dance
Politely, she’d declined.
“I have promised many others,
-perhaps another time.”

He accepted this with all good grace-
“Perhaps another time,
When your dance card is nearly full,
The last dance shall be mine.”

The night was young and she was fair,
Men clamored for their chance.
In some eyes she saw routine lust,
In others- true romance.

Her card was signed by many
There remained a single line.
She stopped back at her table
for a final cup of wine.

The dark and handsome stranger
was waiting for her there.
She took his hand without protest
as he rose up from his chair.

He led her to the dance floor
as the band played one last time.
The music was a stately waltz
done in three quarter time.

His arms were strong and masterful
as he led her in the dance
Her will seemed to desert her
as she fell into a trance.

In the half light she looked up
And searched his face and eyes
The eyes of Death looked back at her,
In lust for her demise..
Swept up in her dance with Death,
She uttered not a sound
for she was in his power now.
and destined for the ground.

John F. McCullagh
The Last Farewell

Last night we kissed hands goodbye,  
ever dreaming that it was forever.  
Unsuspecting that you, my dear child,  
soon would lie cold and still neath the heather.

The graceless Sun thoughtlessly shines  
I would eclipse it forever.  
The death I prepared for was mine,  
but God twists the knife and is clever.

First your sister, thirteen summers ago  
Then, soon after, I lost your dear Mother.  
Now you, daughter- taken from me.  
There's no chance this old man can recover.

The comet that shone at my birth  
Will soon light its way through the heavens  
I beg that it bears me away-  
lets me stop being Samuel Clemmens.

(This poem is about the death of Mark Twain's daughter, who died on 12/24/1909. The speaker is Mark Twain. (Samuel L. Clemmens) He died four months later as Halley's comet lite the night sky. He was born during one visit of the comet and died upon its return.

John F. McCullagh
The Last Knight Of Glin

When Desmond Fitzgerald succumbed to disease
his hereditary knighthood expired.
He had fathered no son to take up his sword.
No heir means the title's retired.
For eight hundred years and twenty nine scions
The grand clan Fitzgerald held sway.
Now with his last breath, no successor is left
So, with honors, he's buried today.

The green knight of Kerry is still in the field,
The last Irish knight in the fray.
Not that he sallies forth swinging a sword.
He sits home and drinks sherry all day.

John F. McCullagh
The Last Minute Tax Planner

He itemized his medical bills,
Maxed retirement deductions.
He's given cash to charities
and Democratic functions.
This scion of the one percent
knows its his cash they're after.
Manipulating tax returns
will keep him the last laugher.
A death this year is profitable
before tax cuts expire.
While he'll probably miss his parents
Still he set their house on fire.
He hates to see the old place go
but still he watched it burn
while thinking of deductions
for the Estate's tax return.

John F. McCullagh
The Law Regarding Love

In New York, the Empire state
There is a law
men would do well to heed.
This obscure statute bears upon
A gentlemen's carnal need
To ask a lady to yield her love
at first, is not a crime.
Should she demur and you insist
you'll wind up doing time.
Be sure to ask her love just once
if state law you would heed
If you persist a second time
just be prepared to plead.

John F. McCullagh
I lay down on my childhood bed with a bottle, half empty, in my hand.
I raised my pistol to my temple; feeling lost, hopelessly dammed.
I flicked the safety off my forty five and took a pull from my Jim Beam.
I was ready to be a sad statistic, another tortured Ex- Marine.

I pulled the trigger, this much I know. What happened next, I can surmise.
I passed out from the alcohol, the pistol jammed; I didn’t die.

My friend had died at his own hand, just one of six from my old team.
We’re tortured by the ghosts of war; in flashbacks I can hear the screams.
We buried my friend yesterday. The flag was folded and Taps was played.
A detail fired blank salutes as his family wept and his mother prayed.
I bowed my head and turned to go; His mother stayed me with her hand.
"I hope you will not be tempted- to do the thing your brothers do."
She pressed a spent brass casing into my open hand.
I looked down, dumbly, in surprise.
“I know you are a soul at risk.” I’ve seen that look in my son’s eyes.”
“If only I’d known how to help; only too late do we grow wise.”
She made me promise, then and there, that I’d not put my mother through
the anguish and the agony that other keening mothers knew.

Today I face another day; the journey will be hard, I know.
I poured the bottle down the drain, and turned to face my shadow foe.

John F. McCullagh
The Libation Bearer

The day is grey, the clouds hang low, and, in the air, a winter chill.
Upon the beach called Omaha an old soldier stands; a promise to fulfill.
Full Seventy years ago this man, weighted down with gear and kit,
raced across this wet grey sand, and, by some miracle, remained unhit.
Friends who'd survived that longest day, and all the long days after it,
had purchased the bottle held in his hands. As the last man standing
he had charge of it:

His eyes, watery from the wind, Looked at the bottle in his hands:
A Dom Perignon Brut Champagne, the 47' vintage year.
He thought about his comrades gone. Surely they were heroes all
Who spilled out from the Higgins boats to breach the Hun's Atlantic wall.
He felt the presence of the ghosts, all those who fell upon this shore.
Boys, really, almost all eighteen, who'd died
answering Freedom's call.

He tore the foil with old gnarled hands; His Arthritis made a chore of this.
Thin wire held the cork in place and was so difficult to untwist.
Once free his placed his thumbs upon the curved underbelly of the cork
The cork shot free across the sand and bubbly foam
chased after it.

He was not a religious man, it seemed impious for him to pray
Though he recalled so many had, that day they bled their lives away.
How best to honor these fallen men? Who had pledged their lives, each to each.
It was then he turned the bottle down and poured the contents
on the beach.

Some would declare it sacrilege to let that vintage go to waste.
The old soldier smiled and felt at peace.
He'd seen the vintage of 26' poured out in buckets
In this very place..

John F. McCullagh
The Libation Bearers

The earth eclipsed the moon tonight
and turned that orb blood red.
The Sox just swept the Cardinals
and Bambino's curse lies dead.

Old Da had rooted Eighty years
but never saw them win.
Of Buckner, back in Eighty Six,
he never spoke again.

So first I went and bought us beers,
I got Sam Adams best.
Then I crept into the graveyard
where old Da takes his rest.

I poured his drink upon the grave
and raised my bottle high.
We beat the hated Yankees, Da!
Next year our banner flies!

All around me here and there
were Red Sox fans, my peers-
All celebrating with their Dads
and wiping back the tears.

John F. McCullagh
We imagine Life sequential-
from birth until we go.
Yet, being fraught with memory,
I protest it is not so.
Our hates, our loves, our prejudice,
all build up over years.
Before we face the precipice,
we face our sum of fears.
My passionate kiss upon your neck
was learned with other lovers.
Even in the here and now
I'll speak some phrase of mother's.
Even when all my cutaneous cells
have shed and been replaced.
I continue to show the world,
what appears the selfsame face.
Every moment of my 'Now'
betrays this underpinning
Only in my final breath
can I put paid to my sinning.

John F. McCullagh
The Light Brigade Charge

"Did I hesitate a moment? Did I stop and wonder why? We were ordered to attack by some blunderer up high. We were all, I think, afraid. Who wouldn't be right then? Those Russians were entrenched and had artillery with them. We must have looked magnificent on our chargers riding high As we rode for God and Country, we knew Death was standing by. I saw my brother Henry die and more brave lads besides. We dressed the line and galloped on, We who were about to die. My horse was shot from under me and that threw me to the sod. The battle sounded distant and my left arm felt quite odd. Some Shrapnel cut my face and thigh, but I saw many worse. Some men called for their mothers, others raged and cursed. Our gallant charge was broken by effective cannon fire. There were many horses riderless like the one that I acquired. When I got back behind our lines, I thanked my equine friend. Then I realized he'd been Henry's mount when this travesty began. I'm sure there will be an inquiry into how this was misplayed. It is then I'll tell my tale about our murdered light brigade."

John F. McCullagh
The Lliad - In 50 Words Or Less

Paris stole Agamemnon's woman.
Hector Killed Patroclus in a fight.
Achilles took revenge against the Trojan,
but otherwise sat sulking in his tent.
Odysseus, the ever resourceful Greek,
built a wooden horse.
Final score: Greeks 1, Trojans 0
Beware of Greeks bearing gifts!

John F. McCullagh
The Lone Piper

Here by the shore of the swift flowing Boyne
Where the Jacobite cause bled and died.
Here the piper had come to find his dead sons
that their loved native soil must soon hide.
What chance had they here against William's cannon
Armed with muskets their grand sires bore?
Why had they been drawn to the sound of the guns?
A call they will hear nevermore.
While he searched he still harbored the faintest of hopes
That one of his sons still might bide.
But no, then he saw them as if they both slept
by the shore of the Boyne, side by side.
Beneath a great oak the man buried his hopes
His spade turned the red clay aside.
His strong hands worked the earth for all he was worth
as a trickle of sweat stung his eyes.

I have heard that man play, on the cool evening's breath,
Such a dirge as would make angels weep.
It's a cry from his heart that escapes from his pipes
to the place where his two heroes sleep.

John F. McCullagh
The Lonely One

The Lonely Ghost

When his heart stopped on the table, and the nurse pronounced the time,
Graham was surprised as any that his consciousness survived.
He was a lifelong bureaucrat; venial, unrefined,
with all of the complexity of a soured table wine.
He was not meet for Heaven. He wasn't good or kind.
He thought he'd join the Devils, but his option was declined.
So he wandered as a lonely ghost in a world gone monochrome.
Surely there were others like him but they did not make themselves known.
He grew envious of his ashes, resting silent in their urn.
His mortal flesh, consumed by flames, was at no risk of return.
One time he tried to say a prayer, to stir the mystic Chords,
But no one heard a syllable; he had forgotten all his words.
He wandered like this countless years until he lost his mind.
It had been his choice to live like this when he still had world and time.

John F. McCullagh
The Long Goodbye

The thing that killed her has a name
It formed the plaque that scarred her brain.
She embarked upon that one way trip
where names elude and memories slip

This disease is most unkind
It slows the step and clouds the mind
Her daughter daily watched her fade
into a lemure, a ghostly shade.

She was not frail at eighty nine
She’d cold cocked nurses in her time
who came too close with an I.V.
and paid dearly for their ministry.

The heart was strong, but not the mind
Ten years passed, as we count time.
She couldn’t hear or speak our names
How silent then her world became.
She couldn’t eat without an aide,
Or walk without a metal cane.
At the last- the chair with wheels
And we all saw how helpless feels.

Some say death is most unkind
Perhaps, for those before their time-
But for those who linger at his door
There is no gift they wanted more.

John F. McCullagh
The Lost Generation

For those who view abortion different;
As the murder of an unborn innocent,
There’s a Newtown massacre every day
with nameless victims for whom they pray.
Not wishing to gainsay the law
of privacy or woman’s right to choose.
Praying more for a change of heart,
for children not to be refused.
For there are songs that might have been
That never will be sung.
Blank Canvases, devoid of paint,
That never will be done.
In truth, a generation lost,
As one was lost before;
The first upon the fields of France,
the next on Clinic floors.
No firearms employed this time
but the carnage is the same;
Helpless bodies torn apart
Their blood poured down the drain.
I’ve seen the people up in arms
When Madmen use their right to choose,
But abortionists grow fat and rich
Please understand why I’m confused.

John F. McCullagh
The Loved One

“The grief therapist will see you now.”
the perky redhead told us.
Her rolling hips then led the way
majestically before us..

Final arrangements must be made.
as our loved one is gone;
Melvin joined the choir invisible
by singing his swan song.

He had been fading badly,
and we knew the end was near.
Now he’s a mortuary client,
ready for his final bier..

Thank God for prearrangements
or we truly would be gored.
It gets to be quite expensive
when you’re sleeping with the Lord.

He’s shuffled off this mortal coil
and brought the curtain down.
Soon he’ll be checking out the grass
from six feet underground..

Melvin has given up the ghost.
He was snuffed out in his prime.
He cashed his chips in early,
passing on before his time.

“Your loved one’s in a better place.”
The Undertaker gravely said..
“His ancestors have embraced him
in a place of light, not dread.”

Some will say he kicked the bucket,
checked out early, bought the farm.
The religious say he’s with the Lord,
The perpetual light is on.
Melvin, were he here with us, more likely would have said a better place for him would be that redhead’s poster bed.

John F. McCullagh
The Lover's Walk

They briefly loved who sheltered here; the beautiful Sarah and her cousin Will. They fled the City to this place in England's north wild rolling hills. Her husband had neglected her, visiting stables and not her bed. By that wild summer of Sixty-eight their estrangement had come to a head. To this old country house she fled; to linger in her Lover's arms. Their close sanguinity proved no bar; she gladly yielded to his charms. They summered here and oft were seen, together, on the Lover's walk. A place where blackthorn trees entwine; but you know how people love to talk. He left her then, alone, with child, as coloured leaves began to fall. Divorced, disgraced, abandoned thus; She sheltered in another's home. This famous beauty with Stuart blood there would raise her child alone.

Such is the history of this place; their romance played out in these halls. Their scandalous adultery was consummated within these walls. Modern beauties visit still and stroll with beaus the Lover's walk- A place where blackthorn trees entwine and old ghosts whisper in the dark.

John F. McCullagh
The Maiden And The Flames

She was scarcely twenty one
on the day the Reaper came.
A writer of great promise;
Toru Dutt was her name.

Bengali was her native tongue,
but only just her first.
She had conversed in German,
written French and English verse.

Now she lay silent, dressed in white
in the company of flowers.
A shame it was a funeral pyre
and not her wedding bower.

Her sister, overcome with grief,
Her Parents both the same.
Her sad eyed father lit the torch
and consigned her to the flames.

How quickly did those flames consume
the girl who lived to write.
Her dust was carried on the winds
from the sacrificial site.

The beauty of her verse endures
and will preserve her name.
That's all that could be salvaged
of the maiden from the flames.

John F. McCullagh
The Man In The Arena

Find what you love, to that be true
Care less for what “they” think of you.
Follow your internal muse
Dare to take risks and pay your dues.

Some such succeed and triumphs gain,
Others strive but all in vain.-
For both their place can never be
Out in the dark periphery.

In the end our lives are spent
Pursing dreams or paying rent
The choice is ours to play our role
Don’t be a cold and timid soul.

Though our faces be marred by dust and sweat
we are the ones they won't forget.

Not the faceless critic in his seat
who knows neither victory nor defeat

J.M.

“The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”-President Theodore Roosevelt

John F. McCullagh
The Man Who Would Not Be King

For Five long years he fought a war
against the mighty English crown.
At times, it seemed, by will alone
He kept our army in the field.
At Valley Forge our ill clad troops
suffered greatly from the cold.
In New York harbor thousands died,
held as prisoners in foul ships' holds.
The reverses were many, the victories few
until the world turned upside down.
That day at Yorktown when Lord Cornwallis
And all his troops were brought to ground.
Yet, with our independence won,
the victor would not wear a crown.
Like Cincinnatus, the hero of old,
He lay down his arms and went back home.
Washington was that paragon
He refused all kingly robes.
Liberty lives only because
A free man refused to be a Lord.
Remember, if you would stay free,
the price they paid for Liberty.
Remember George who wore no crown.
His sacred honor deserves renown.

John F. McCullagh
The Man With The Thousand Yard Stare

He sits with a stoic's resistance,
    his son in the casket lies there.
No line of a tear mars his visage-
the man with the Thousand yard stare.

He sits in the front row of mourners,
His dear sobbing wife by his side
in silence he keeps his sad vigil
and stares up at Christ crucified.

The mourners pass by him in silence,
touch his hand or say meaningless words,
for his part he stares straight on through them
as if nothings felt, nothings heard.

The Parson commands us to silence
and struggles to lead us in prayer-
but half of the room has forgotten the words
like the man with the thousand yard stare

Death is my race's core competence
dealing with life, we're but fair,
but none living today keeps sorrow at bay
not the man with the thousand yard stare.

John F. McCullagh
Look and find our names upon The Wall,
Hargrove, Hall and Marshall were our names.
We were three men that were left behind,
three Marines still owed honorable graves.

Marines took back the hijacked Mayaguez
and recovered all her crewmen safe and well
But while our mission accomplished its objective
The Ninth Marines were ferried into hell.

The helicopters took us to the island,
Koh Tang, in the Southern China sea
The Khmer Rouge were dug in on the island
prepared for an assault from air or sea.

They say it was a failure of Intelligence-
The crew of The Mayaguez was moved before
The 2nd battalion forces first were landed
Upon that hostile beach, that deadly shore

Lieutenant Col. Randall Austin was commanding
Our perimeter was shrinking by the hour
Our landing force had taken heavy losses
Some died upon the beach, more drowned offshore.

It happened in perimeter reduction
we three men were forgotten in our hole.
When Helicopters flew the rest to safety
We were left behind on the atoll.

Some say we died that day, some say after
Reports are we were tortured and then killed.
Some claim we were forgotten by our nation.
But our names are on The Wall- you never will.

Look and find our names upon The Wall,
Hargrove, Hall and Marshall were our names.
We were three men that were left behind,
three Marines still owed honorable graves.
On May 15, 1975, two weeks after the last Americans fled Saigon, the men of the fourth and Ninth Marines were ordered to retake the U.S.S. Mayaguez and rescue her crew. The ship had been seized by elements of the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia. It was mistakenly believed that the crew were being held hostage on Koh Tang Island, Cambodia. While the 4th Marines Delta Company successfully boarded and retook the Mayaguez, the ninth Marines were landing on the beach at Koh Tang. Officially, the second battalion of the Ninth Marine Regiment lost 18 dead, 41 wounded and three MIA. In addition 7 of 8 assault helicopters that took part in the original assault were destroyed.

This last battle of the Vietnam War era was a tragedy of errors. The Marines were sent to rescue crewmen who were no longer on the Island. The crew was rescued elsewhere. The Khmer Rouge troops on the Island were expecting an attack by the Viet Cong as the island was the subject of a territorial dispute. The marines were sent in, based on faulty intelligence, against a force whose strength and dispositions had been badly underestimated by our leaders. The fire fight on the Island was so fierce that the dead had to be left where they had fallen.

Lance Corporal John N. Hargrove, PFC Gary L Hall and Danny G. Marshall’s names appear on panel 1W lines 130-131 of the Vietnam memorial in Washington D.C. They are the last combat fatalities of the Vietnam conflict. Not all heroes are buried in Arlington Cemetery

John F. McCullagh
The Model Prisoner

He showers each day,
and he takes out the trash.
He works in the garden at times.
Mostly he sits in his cell and he reads.
He has never admitted his crime.

He seldom gets visitors
and hasn’t made many friends.
He sits by himself at mealtimes.
He serves a life sentence-no hope of parole
Until death he’ll remain here inside.

Conjugal visits? It’s been several years.
Since last she was seen by his side.
At lights out, sometimes,
you can hear gentle sobbing
as a little bit more of him dies.

John F. McCullagh
The Moment After, A Poem Of Hiroshima

It’s strange, there was no pain.
The atom moves too fast for that.
It left my shadow on that wall,
There’s nothing else intact.

It’s strange to die so quickly
I had no time for fear.
Swept up, as in a rapture
Less than a leaf, more than a tear.

My conscious self dissolving
Like a sugar dropped in tea.
No body left to bury
You incinerated me.

Elsewhere in the city
They’ll unearth a murdered clock-
It’s hands forever frozen
on the moment I was not.

John F. McCullagh
The Mouse Before Christmas

The Mouse before Christmas

Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a person was sleeping, all because of one mouse;
The glue traps were placed by the kitchen and stair
In hopes that St. Mickey soon would be there;
The children were hiding, afraid in their beds,
While nightmares of furry pests danced in their heads;
And mamma in her one piece and I in my wrap,
Had just finished baiting the last of the traps,
When down on my lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
bumped into the bedpost and incurred quite a gash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below,
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and eight mouseketeers,
With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Mick.
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name;

'Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen!

On, Comet! on Cupid! on, Donder and Blitzen!

To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!

Now dash away! dash away! dash away all! '

As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,

When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,

So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,

With the sleigh full of cheese, and old St. Mick too.

And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof

The prancing and pawing of each little thief

As I reached for my bat, and was turning around,

Down the chimney old St. Mick came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his tail,

And his clothes looked like stuff from a second hand sale;

A sack to hold cheese he had flung on his back,

he looked like a smart shopper as he planned his attack.

His eyes - how they twinkled! his whiskers, how merry!

His cheeks were light grey, his nose like a berry!

His droll little mouth was drawn up to reveal,

a pair of incisors gleaming brightly like steel;
The knob of the bat I held tight in my hand,
and I swung it like I hoped to hit a grand slam;
I missed him completely and took down our tree
He near stroked out with laughter so great was his glee,
as he used tinsel garland to bind and to gag me;
A wink of his eye and a twist of his tail,
Soon gave me to know I had epically failed;
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
and stole all our cheese; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his right paw aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;
He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,
So Long to you sucker, and thanks for the bite!

John F. McCullagh
The Mouth Of The Flowers

On a lonely road they traveled,
Michael Collins and his friends.
Though the road led to
Cork City
He would never see its end.
For the I.R.A. was waiting
where they knew that he must pass.
O’Neil, an I.R.A. man,
T’was him who fired the fatal blast.
Kitty Kiernan made a widow
before she ever was a bride.
On an August day in Twenty two
Brave Michael Collins died.

John F. McCullagh
The Murder Of Miriam Carey

A distraught mother with her daughter ventured too close to the flame. Her erratic driving provoked panic; The police reaction was insane.

What justification can there be for gunning down an unarmed foe? What cause for use of lethal force When she had nowhere left to go?

By some miracle her child was spared though 15 bullets pierced their Lexus. She’s too young to recall this day or her Mother’s final nexus.

Suicide by cop, most likely, will be the Media’s diagnosis. She was not some terrorist- just a victim of psychosis.

The officer who gunned her down- And saw her body at his feet- Might not like his mirror much, Might need medicines to sleep

John F. McCullagh
The Names On The Wall

They're your uncles or your brothers;
They're the ones who fought and bled.
Theirs are the names upon this wall,
the legion of our dead.
They didn't run to Canada
when they heard their country call.
They ran toward the sound of guns;
All through the Sixties did they fall.
So spare a moment at the wall,
Peruse their names incused.
Long Summers past, they were like us,
with so much more to lose.

John F. McCullagh
The New Barbarians

They invade us from our hospitals,
They come in ones or twos.
They're cute but they're unruly,
a most uncivilized crew.
They speak no human language
Yet demand that they be fed.
Their pitiful screams at 2 A.M.
Leave their parents feeling dead.
They need to be taught manners;
To say "Thank You" and "Please".
We need them to be immunized
against childhood disease.
In time they'll become civilized;
Young Ladies and Gentlemen.
Until that time they must be confined
In their strollers and playpens.

John F. McCullagh
The Night Patrol, Laos 1962

My point man had died where he stood.
The rest of my squad dove for cover.
My helmet had tumbled and fallen
and I clung to the ground like a lover.
The lifespan of a second Lieutenant
is measured in minutes I’m told.
I rolled and I rose to my knees.
I fired a mag from my piece.
There was movement out there in the trees.
Visceral fear shook my knees.
Novak had tossed a grenade.
In seconds a blast splintered wood.
The bark of three M-60’s. then
cut through the growth like a scythe.
The foe, in black silk pajamas,
In violence departed this life.
My radio man slid up beside me
Headquarters was on the phone.
I told them one dead and three wounded.
I sensed we were still not alone.
We established a defensive perimeter
and waited for dawn to arrive.
Our camouflage, soaked by the rain,
clung to those grunts still alive.

John F. McCullagh
The Nipple

Taunt, firm, erect and pleasing fair
and warm amidst the cool night air.
A drop of breast milk is expressed
to please the one who loves it best.
He who waits with undisguised pleasure
to suck upon it at his leisure.
Relax, this is no porn spawned prattle
Just baby Rob and his Two A.M. bottle.

John F. McCullagh
The Oak Ridge Gang

An old nun and two aged hippies
Down in Oak Ridge, Tennessee,
protesting 'gainst the A bomb
Breeched homeland security.

Armed only with fence cutters,
And ignoring warning signs,
they made it past the wire
in Olympic record time.

The Penguin and her minions
Splashed human blood against the wall
Of the 'well secured' establishment.
Where plutonium is stored.

Only then were they arrested
By Cheech and Chong, our well paid guards.
The nun beamed at the cameras
When escorted from the yard.

Amazed I am I can't emplane
Unmolested and scott free,
While Nuns with nasty habits
run amuck in Tennessee.

John F. McCullagh
The Old Man

Nothing lasts forever without ceasing.
For every laugh, somewhere a tear drops down.
When you lose someone your steps feel so uncertain.
No longer do you trust the solid ground.
For so it chances in the lives of men
That day comes when their fathers go before.
The flesh and blood becomes a ghostly presence.
The veil has dropped between them ever more.
When dialogues becomes soliloquies,
The things you meant to say mean that much more
because they will forever stay unspoken
save to his stone in moments spend alone.

John F. McCullagh
The Old Oak Tree

I remember so well this old oak tree.
There was a swing hung from that limb.
On bright summer days you would swing and sway
waiting for your future to begin.

On warm summer night beneath celestial sights
You'd kick up your heels at the breeze.
You'd fly through the air with nary a care,
swinging as high as you please.

My old eyes are clouded with tears that won't cease
Won't you come see what they've done?
The Klan caught him talking to somebodies girl;
This old Oak is where I found him hung.

I so did enjoy having you for my boy
So proud of the man you would be.
But all came undone, they have murdered my son;
Left him hung on the limb of that tree.

John F. McCullagh
The Only Way Is Through

I stand beside your open door
And look into the room.
A moment’s hesitation, just,
A chill of pending doom.

I confess I’ve feared this day,
And hope my sight proves wrong,
but you still and quiet lay, -
a pause within a song-. 

Your body covered with a sheet
No stir, no breathe of air
Waiting, patient, for the boatman
with nothing to declare.

I hesitate a moment there
Unsure of what to do
Then quietly remind myself
my only way is through

John F. McCullagh
The Opposite Of Love

Some say the opposite of Love is Hate;
That blazing hot antipathy is true Love’s stablemate.
Yet I cannot suppose that true for both Love and Hate
Give significance to the object of their passion or their scorn.
Thus they are more alike than we suppose;
In visage they are cousins, just wearing different robes.
No. Indifference is the opposite of Love.
Love warms Love’s object and holds it near and dear.
Indifference is an icy death that anyone would fear.
No touch, no glance, no loving words; This signifies Love is done.
Like a comet outward bound, banished by the Sun.
Banished from your light and warmth, I am become no one.

John F. McCullagh
The O'Rahilly

Michael O’Rahilly was leading the charge, a hopelessly wasteful foray. The English were waiting behind barricades as the Gaels made their desperate play. Rifles at the ready; they charged up Moore Street, the O'Rahilly leading the way. Like paper consumed by a flickering flame, their manpower melted away. O'Rahilly lay dying, but the British just laughed, no aid would they give to the foe. The cobblestones reeked of the blood on the street as the bodies were laid in a row. Heroes perhaps have a touch of the poet, a dram of unreason besides, but everyone knows of the charge of O’Rahilly; Everyone knows how he died. It was, he well knew, a magnificent gesture, the English be dammed and despised. He lingered, in agony, nineteen long hours, then, immortal or not, he expired.

John F. McCullagh
The Other Half Of Me

Plato told a fabulous tale
of two souls so meant to be
that when they met together
she completed he.

For so it was with us, my Love,
from childhood's first shy glance.
For far longer than most married folk
we shared Love's sweet slow dance.

Now it seems you want a break
We no longer are a pair;
At parties where we'd both attend
there is one empty chair.

Our once shared bed is empty, too.
This place I toss and turn.
Faint fragrant traces of perfume
remind me why I yearn.

A brief lacuna in our life
I hope this proves to be.
If this parting is forever
were we never meant to be?

I've lost the best part of myself,
our friends so clearly see.
Like part of Plato's soul I seek
the other half of me.

John F. McCullagh
The Other Side Of The Street

All though my married days I've lived
on the West side of the street.
I have dealt with plows in winter
that buried me knee deep
The West sides' winter sun is scarce
too weak to melt the ice.
So you'll see me out there chipping away
(Miami would be nice)
They get their trash collected first,
while we must wait a day.
I think the mailman likes them too,
He always starts their way.
In Spring their lawns are greener
In summer they have shade.
My back porch boils each afternoon-
no wonder I'm dismayed.
Mayhap I would be famous for
these poems that I excrete
If only I'd had the wit to live on
the other side of the street.

John F. McCullagh
The Parliament Of Whores

There are some, who serve big business,
who spread them wide and smile.
Some others say they’re populists
“Spread the Wealth’s” their style.
Some are just obstructionists.
For them, delay is fun.
They all butt heads together
And by default get nothing done.
They are the US Congress,
I wish they’d close their doors.
A plague on both your houses-
you Parliament of whores!

John F. McCullagh
The Pauper And The Prince

A child this day was born in Britain
but no camera men record this birth.
He's not the child of Kate and William.
He's common clay of humble earth.
He'll soldier on four score and seven
He'll fight and win your senseless war.
He'll never claim noblesse oblige
as he shoulders debt from those before.
One is born Royal, the other common.
One wears Purple, the other, dust.
One shall be the king of England.
One's blood is blue, the other, rust.
One shall head the church of England
The other lad will own a pub.
Which one in time will prove right noble?
to quote the bard 'Aye, there's the rub.'

John F. McCullagh
The Pearl

If all my life was perfect,
and all right with the world.
My pen would suffer from disuse.
My parchment not unfurled.
For what fool indeed
would waste his time
scribbling down lines
When Dame Love beckons to the feast
and all the world was mine.

No, irritation is my muse
and I her slaving churl
who palpitates a bit of grit
until it is
a
Pearl.

John F. McCullagh
The Pearl Of Great Price

It started as a bit of grit stuck in an Oyster's craw.
In time, through suffering, bit by bit it became the Pearl you saw.
Translucent pink, a perfect orb, no polishing required,
You alone possess this gem which many have desired.
It cost you dear, this perfect pearl, as the bid grew steadily higher.
You'd have gladly given all you had to possess its inner fire.
Time and suffering produced the Pearl, it is immutable law.
Forget that at your peril for the Pearl would be no more.
The Pearl is not a bauble meant to dazzle others' eyes.
It, like wisdom borne of suffering, is its own reward and prize.

John F. McCullagh
The Photograph

It is a very old photograph, yellowed with age.  
It was made from the light of a century ago.  
My grandparents sit in their brand new Ford  
with my mother and my uncle.  
They have sat there stoically watching  
Though years of war and peace,  
prosperity and ruin.  
They have been mute witnesses to the births and deaths;  
the joy, the tears, the laughter.  
The subjects themselves are all gone now:  
my grandmother first; my mother last of all.  
(I think the Ford got traded for a Hudson.)  
The accumulated light of those ten decades  
effaces all away.  
The images are fading, some features barely can be seen  
But I still recognize my mother's determined stare  
as her nine year old self  
faces down the photographer.

John F. McCullagh
The Pillars Of Creation

I have seen them in their majesty, in ultraviolet light.
They stretch across five light years' space there in the dark of night.
They are the womb of newborn stars, the cradle and the nave.
The elements are present there, in aquamarine shade.
Within the Pillars there is light, the light of proto-stars,
Surrounded by the swirling dust which will be what we are.
Then, sometime in the yet to be, on such a starry night,
They may note the death of Sol, the star that gave us light.
As they see our old star swell then shrink as fuels run out.
They too may pause and think, in wonder at the sight.

John F. McCullagh
The Plight Of The Bumble Bee

In meadows, rich with clover, I have seen them here before;
those industrious little creatures at their pollinating chore.
Now the land is strangely silent, was Rachel Carson right?
Are we killing all the bumblebees? Have they made their final flight?
There are those who point to climate change as the source of all our pain.
If the bumble bee is dying, it is heat stress that’s to blame.
Others theorize a virus as the cause of their demise;
an illness ravaging the hives and emptying our skies.
I even heard one scientist make the hypothesis
that our overuse of cell phones is the cause of all of this.

Could it be that our usage of glyphosate is to blame;
As GMO spreads on our fields, our crops are not the same.
Monsanto is an Agra-Corp with bought friends in D.C.;
A “friendly’ Legislature insures profitability.
The F.D.A. is slow to act; Congress drafts obstructive laws.
It seems to me, just possibly, they already know the cause.

John F. McCullagh
The Poet's Autopsy

They found him, slumped over, in his small writer's garret. 
There were no obvious signs of foul play. 
No wounds, no abrasions or ligature marks 
and just the faint hint of decay.

Later, laid out on a cold metal table, 
No cause for his death could they find. 
His arteries clean as twenty year olds. 
His cholesterol levels all fine.

He didn't do drugs and he didn't drink beer. 
His death was not self-inflicted. 
His muse had abandoned him; took his will to live. 
His demise could thus be predicted.

For a poet with have himself tied to a mast
To heard the sweet song of a Si-ren. 
The loss of one's muse is a serious blow; 
Look what it did to Lord Byron!

John F. McCullagh
The Police Report

The Cop stood in the doorway
With his handkerchief held to his nose.
A young white male, the tenant,
had died in this apartment.
This must have happened three days ago at least.
It had taken that long for the smell
To permeate the building;
before someone thought to summon the law.

From the looks of it, another overdose-
Another young victim of a cruel epidemic
That takes the young and leaves the old to grieve.
Those who choose to ride that particular horse
Need rodeo clowns with Nar-Can standing by.

Was it an accident or a suicide?
Perhaps the M.E. could make the determination;
a fine distinction between blurred lines.
There will be need to notify the next of kin
to claim the corpse and make the final disposition.
Then soon, perhaps next week-

a studio in Williamsburg for rent.

John F. McCullagh
The Poppy Seller

The poppy seller stands near the Rotunda.
He vends his paper flowers as before.
He wears a small red poppy in Remembrance
of heroes fallen in our nation’s wars.

The people pass as if he’s’ non existent,
more interested to buy well watered beer.
The Veteran feels the sting of their indifference-
Upon his grizzled cheek I spy a tear.

I cannot, will not also pass in silence
I stop and donate something at his stall
He stammers thanks, but he needn’t thank me-
more fitting that I thank those who gave all.

They who owed us nothing gave us everything.
We, their debtors, balk to pay our share.
And still the poppy flourishes in Burgundy,
past living memory, as a wordless prayer..

John F. McCullagh
The Price Of Admission

In this garden of stone
I reflect on my own
Of the journey that grief has imposed:
Those first sad raw days
When I walked in a daze
At the loss of a parent I loved.

Grief’s first taste is bitter
And only slowly gets better;
An acquired perspective I think.
It must be endured
Or else it consumes
those who seek false refuge in drink.

To love and be loved
Always carries this cost:
The Reaper insists on division.
The survivor condemned
To weep bitter tears
For that is the price of admission.

John F. McCullagh
The Quiet Ones

My brother-in-law is the tightly wound sort.  
Self contained in his miserable way.  
Always quick with a quip or a nasty retort,  
and, most likely, a miserable lay.

His job unfulfilling, his woman unwilling.  
His co-workers thought he was gay.  
He labored long hours for his indifferent masters  
for infrequent raises in pay.

When he defenestrated his co worker Sally  
and police asked me, what could I say?  
' It's always the quiet ones  
you have to watch out for-  
I knew this would happen someday.'

John F. McCullagh
The Race

Ah injury in sophomore year
Caused me to miss the springtime meets.
Was sitting in a cast
While my teammates won their heats.

Am no brain, I can’t sit still
No chance I’ll ace the S.A.T.
But medal wins in track and field
Could mean a scholarship for me.

Near Lewis is a cinder track-
An oval of a quarter mile.
So I come here to do my laps
And dream of victory for a while.

A short fat man goes jogging by
In sweat drenched shirt and navy shorts
Gasping, like a fish in air,
Fleeing from his mortal thoughts.

Doff my sweats and start to stretch
Take no chances with this knee.
Don’t think I’m feeling good and loose,
It pays to warm up properly.

A tall thin runner, strangely pale,
About half of the track ahead
I pass him like he’s standing still
Then he’ll be chasing me instead.

Pass the jogger right away
The pale runner, though, moves speedily
Pick up my pace a notch
Just as quickly so does he.
I stretch my stride, he does the same
And gains upon me steadily
I thought that I was chasing him
It seems instead he’s chasing me.

Never raced this guy before
At any of the local meets
He appears to be as old as me
But his gear is “thrift shop” quality.

Sure enough, he’s gaining fast.
I dig down for a last reserve
I didn’t think I’d lost a step
Bad news, if it’s true, for me

I hear his foot falls close behind
And vainly try to stay ahead
I turn my head to see his face
It is the face of one long dead.

The ghostly winner makes a turn
And passes through the gate and chains
The cemetery lies beyond
That holds the urn with his cremains

You saw him too” the fat man gasps-
I thought that he had come for me”
I knew he only came to run
Recognized the ghost you see.

Tommy Miller was his name
School Champion back in 63’
He died crossing this finish line
An aneurysm in his brain.”

Unfinished business binds him here
A restless spirit, more than most,
The race is ever to the swift
The quick are beaten by a ghost

John F. McCullagh
The Race For The Cure

I had a sister once
She had sunshine in her smile
She was everybody’s friend
For you she’d gladly walk a mile

When I see her in my mind’s eye
Jeanette’s forever young
When we lost her to the monster
She was only 41.

So that is why tomorrow
I’ll be racing for the cure.
With caregiver’s and survivors
We will beat the beast for sure.
And if my step should falter
As I am no longer young
Her ghost will run beside me
Until my race is run.

Perhaps you have a sister too,
Or someone that you love
Perhaps she’s a survivor
Of a battle bravely won

We must celebrate the victories
Each year there are still more
Until what was a feeble cheer
Becomes a mighty roar

So that is why tomorrow
You’ll be racing for the cure.
With caregiver’s and survivors
We will beat the beast for sure.
And if your step should falter
For you are no longer young
Your survivor friend will pace you,
Until this race is won.

Gather at the starting line
Young and old together
The sisters and the daughters
And survivors feeling better
There may be 20,000 here
The organizers say
They fail to count the shadows
Who will run with us today.

So that is why today we’re here
All racing for the cure.
Family, friends and lovers
We will beat the beast for sure.
And if our steps should falter
For we are no longer young
Our dead will bear us forward,
Until their race is won.

John F. McCullagh
The Recusant

When you're hanging by the neck
until your life is nearly done,
It might almost seem a blessing
when the hangman lets you down.
They then spread you on a table
Then the real torture began.
They cut away the man parts
from their sacrificial lamb.
Then your core is cruelly opened
and your bloody entrails rise
in the hands of he, your butcher
displayed before your dying eyes.
Your brain supplies an image
of back when you were a child
and you greeted good Queen Mary
in fine ornate Latin style.
Mercifully shock set in
as death transfixed your eyes.
Sweet Jesus' name was on his lips
as the recusant dies.

John F. McCullagh
The Reign Of Tara

Of all the souls that I have known
while walking around in flesh and bone,
hers was the sweetest and the best,
especially when seen undressed.

she had been scalded while she was young
and even now she bears the scar.
An accident, her mother said.
I wondered then, I wonder now.

I'm damaged goods, she first confessed
When first I sought to kiss those breasts.
Hesitantly, her shirt undone.
I sought her nipples with my tongue.

Thereafter, lovers of a sort
inseparable, with love our sport.
Her little dog thought I was great
Her mother, though, viewed me with hate.

Then came the day my father died
With heavy heart I called my girl
The mother answered, venom hissing.
We're done, I thought. Just what she's wishing.

For what its worth, from this perspective,
misguided was her Mom's invective
Had Tara listened to her terrier
we both might have grown old the merrier.

John F. McCullagh
The Relay Race

I may have been the slowest child
to ever run in track and field
I was a foodie even then
with not the fastest set of wheels.

I still have the medal that I won
for finishing in second place.
awarded to our relay team
In a two team relay race

I was the anchor(aptly named)
they could have called me 'ball and chain'
The other three were none to spry
We were well matched those three and I.

By the time the baton reached my hand
My competitor neared the promised land
I set out full steam(for me)
as he crossed the line to victory.

I gamely tried to speed in haste
for what I knew was second place
and I was genuinely surprised
when they gave medals to us guys.

I never after won a race
nor finished either show or place.
I prize the medal that I got.
If I was a horse, they'd have me shot.

John F. McCullagh
The Revenge Of The 64 Ounce Soda

Michael Bloomberg was awakened in an unfamiliar bed. Restraining bands were on his limbs and also on his head. He began to get suspicious as the room was cherry red. "There's no use for you to struggle." An announcer's voice then said.

"You've hurt our sales with your campaigns" the pleasant voice went on. "Our sales are down across the board, our latest soda bombed." "While our truckers want to rub you out, We insist you won't be harmed." "We are trying to convert you, though our tactics are strong armed."

For this most unwilling witness our jingle was replayed, I cannot say how often, it went on for many days. He was forced to watch commercials, all in praise of soda pop. Big gulps were his nourishment, though he longed to make it stop.

Then, when his brain was Cola washed
And we finally set him free,
Michael Bloomberg bought the world a Coke
And sang in harmony.

John F. McCullagh
The Road To Emmaus

Did you ever wonder why,
As you hung upon the cross,
we weren’t ready for your words?
if we were worth the price it cost?

At a place they call the skull,
hung upon a tree to die,
With nails that pierce your wrists and feet,
and dying thieves on either side.

“Others he did save,
but he cannot save himself”
Executed like a slave,
By a Rome malignant to itself.

As you spoke your final words
And then hung your head to die
Did you fear you were heard only
By the sparrows and the sky?

When the Pilus pierced your side
And the water flowed like blood
Had you already breathed your last?
Had darkness overcome the sun?

Do you miss the wine and water?
The perfume in the Magdalene’s hair?
When I journey to Emmaus,
Will you accompany me there?

Our hearts will burn like fire
For love of him thought dead
When again we recognize you,
In the breaking of the bread.

John F. McCullagh
The Road To Silence

There's a troubling trend in the land of the "Free".
Many things go unspoken; they're just not "P.C.".
Crimes are committed and no one is shocked
when they go unpunished and lips remained locked.
To speak truth to power is to risk mockery.
You'll be labelled a racist; that's just not "P.C.".
So much as gone wrong In the land of the "Free";
It would bore you to list the whole sad Litany.
If ever you wondered just what you would do
In a time when great evil was threatening you?
You need no longer wonder. You didn't stand tall.
On the sad road to silence you said nothing at all.

John F. McCullagh
The Rock Of Cashel

My mother told me on the bus-
about the tumor in her breast.
She told me in that public place
I was stunned; She, self possessed

she was so calm- no hint of fear.
I was floored by what she said
I was very young back then
with limited knowledge of the dead.

Post surgery she did just fine.
It turned out the tumor was benign.
My mom would say “It’s not my time”.- 
That was her way. She spoke that line.

She did possess that quiet strength
Bequeathed her from High Kings of old
She was a rock of Christian faith
From which derived her peace of soul.

She had that quiet confidence
Death itself held her in awe
Faith banished any fear of Death
who feared to linger at HER door.

John F. McCullagh
The Rolling Cones

You hear their siren song in the air,
before you ever see the truck.
If it is “The Rolling Cones”
then my friend, you are in luck.

Where Mister Softee use to be
an old bald man down on his luck,
“The Rolling Cones” have sweet young things
Make sexy sundaes in a cup.

These ice cream ladies sell the wares
while wearing frilly bustiers.
Men of a certain age all troupe
to wave their dollars for two scoops.

Curves and ice cream swirls can be
Sexy, yes, but not obscene,
It’s a profitable duopoly.
They use hot babes to sell ice cream.

To differentiate their trucks
From the topless coffee vendor “Cups”
They needed a name all their own
That’s why they’re called “The Rolling Cones”

John F. McCullagh
The Runaway Slave

I strain my ears at every sound
As I flee from Masters vast estate
Dare not walk upon the road-
Must not be seen, alone, this late.

I hear the baying of his hounds
My absence has been noted there
Men with torches, men with guns,
My soul freezes me with fear.

I am the fox, his are the hounds
That I must run a desperate race
If fail is to be chained and whipped
Then sold – a horrid fate I face

The dogs grow close, but the river's near
I leap and overcome my fear.
The water will disguise my scent
With swift strong stokes I'll soon be clear

With joy I hear the hounds, confused,
Barking, helpless, and at bay.
But master gets me in his sights
And sets me free another way.

I awaken from sleep with a start.
The nightmare stops, the next begins
Shower, shave and dress for work
And wonder if it ever ends.
The Santa Conspiracy

From ages back in Time,
A Bishop with his coins
Gave succor to unfortunates
And funds to dower daughters.

Although this saintly Nicholas rests
Through centuries of slumber
Something of his spirit lives
When we love one another

A gentle vast conspiracy
Arises round this man
A tale told to the innocents
By parents in all lands.

His myth now robed in red and white
His beard now white and flowing
He dashes round the world by sleigh-
Even if it’s snowing

The story seized by those who sell
Has taken on new life
He first appears at Macy’s bash
And with Rockettes at night

Perhaps an errant Grandma
Has run afoul his sleigh
Perhaps he’s just a cookie thief
This elf to whom kids pray

All I know is evidence
Is everywhere to see:
Suspicious trails of cookie crumbs
And presents at our tree

John F. McCullagh
The Seated Dollar

(Murder of Wild Bill Hitchcock, 08/02/76)

He tossed it down upon the bar, careless of its worth and weight.
To ease his thirst required Whiskey
Then he’d find a woman for a “date”.

Saddle weary and in pain
From the Long and Dusty trail
Bill had rode hard to reach Cheyenne
to rest his boot on this bar rail.

His fate that day did not include
A decent bath or indecent touch-
The Men he gambled with grew angry
His fast gun hand – not fast enough

Someone grabbed that silver dollar
Not bothering to check the date.
The body, whitened with death’s pallor, .
the dead man’s hand; the Aces and Eights.

The seasons turned and turned again
Whole generations turned to dust
The pilfered dollar was collected
Inherited, passed on in Trust.

I lay it gently on the velvet
Careful of its worth and weight
my seated Dollar set requires
a specimen of this grade and date.

John F. McCullagh
The Second Day

Here, in the depths of winter, when the earth is bare and brown,
You will notice, if you look carefully, depressions in the ground.
My guide told me that here there are about one hundred men
who served beneath the Stars and Bars and gave their lives for them.

The Union line was well entrenched up there upon the hill.
Hard shot and double canister rained down on the Rebs at will.
If Ewell had thought it practical, on the first day of the fight,
results might have been different had his soldiers seized these heights.
When he forfeited his advantage, the Stars and Stripes held sway;
Union forces would repel his sorties the next day.

So, with careful measured steps, we walk above these men,
Who loved, not wisely but too well, the cause for which they bled.
Do not disturb this hallowed ground; leave them at rest I pray.
Until they hear the trumpet's call upon the Judgment Day.

John F. McCullagh
The Seven

From the time his boy could stand
The Dad had brought him on the Seven.
To see the Mets they both would go,
before he'd even learned to throw.

All through his childhood and past his teens.
They'd entrain to their field of dreams.
Their Mets found many ways to lose-
most years they had godawful teams.

So soon it was his time to go.
Children grow (Time flies they say) -
His son now has his place downtown
A few short miles and a world away.

Opening day is magical
once more it found them in the stands
Cheering loud, their voices hoarse,
as their team booked yet another loss.

After the excitement of the game
waiting on the platform for their trains
The two men hugged with obvious affection,
then entrained in opposite directions.

John F. McCullagh
The Shadowlands

The Shadow-lands are here about,
hidden from even the most devout.
There those who were, then ceased to be,
enjoy post mortem revelry.
Their ghostly visage sight unseen
by downcast kin that sob and keen.
They linger but a moment, then.
they head off to the shadow-lands.
There they are young and strong and free,
much more than simple memories.
When their earthy foibles are recalled
they laugh hardest of us all.
They’re close whenever called to mind;
The shadow folk are calm and kind.
For they who were, then ceased to be,
well know what mortals fail to see.
Only they can understand
who’ve traveled to the shadow-lands.

John F. McCullagh
The Silent Mandolin

My old friend, you sit in the corner of my room.
My neglect of you is your silent accusation.
How I long to take you in my arms again
and make beautiful music together.
Alas I am not free. I have long loved another.
Now she has been stricken by a terrible fate.
A stroke has laid her low.
My beloved wife cannot speak.
Her whole left side is paralyzed.
I cannot leave her.
I must remain true to my hearts first love,
Even though, looking in her eyes I see
no trace of Love or even recognition.
My world has shrunk to a small suite of rooms
Where a rented hospital bed cradles my Love
And the I.V. drips and machines monitor.
I who once sang for her in a beautiful baritone
and played for her my mandolin.
Now I know only songs of sadness and
I cannot play with these tear filled eyes.
So I have put aside my Mandolin.
I hold onto the hand of my Beloved

and the silence overcomes us both.

John F. McCullagh
The Sleeper

If you’re ever in Chicago, , and you have some extra time, .
There’s a baseball legend buried there, a sleeper of a kind.
He won’t help you win at fantasy. It was long ago he played
For forty years or more he has been waiting in his grave.

John Donaldson was a Monarch on the Kansas City team,
perhaps the greatest pitcher ever in the Negro League.
His fastball was like Feller’s when Bob was in his prime
He had a Curve like Mathewson’s, a Giant of his time.

He is buried among teammates who never made the Show
A three hundred game winner that true fans ought to know.
In little towns and hamlets he won renown and fame
He never made the majors, they were then a white man’s game.

His victories and strikeouts have been obscured by time.
He was born a bit too early to ever break the color line.
He was working toting mailbags on his final fatal day
When, like his famous slider, he would break down and fade away.

John F. McCullagh
The Sleepers

Two sleepers dreaming different dreams
lay together but apart
of a different girl he dreamed
he stirred but didn't start.

Beneath a canopy of stars
on a blanket in the dark
he gently kissed her burn scared breasts
and swore they'd never part.

The other sleeper gently moaned
with her dream love in the dark
deft fingers probed her secret place
as they lay heart to heart.

she may have called a name, not his,
as she shifted in the dark
but is that infidelity
on imaginations part?

Her fellow sleeper also smiled
as he dreamed of love long past
of his promise, long forgotten,
to a love that did not last.

John F. McCullagh
The Song Lives On

His old guitar is where he left it,
Still strung and tuned as on that day.
I remember he would play for hours.
Rock and roll he loved to play.

He never got to hold his grandson
or sit with him in his rocking chair
He's not a name that most remember
but fans of Joanie Jett still care.

For all you who love rock and roll
He wrote your anthem, he penned your prayer
I'll play a cover on my Fender
as the old man rocks up heaven's stair.

John F. McCullagh
The Sound Of Your Laughter

Why do I love you?
because you’re my child.
Since before you were born-
So it’s been quite a while.

I couldn’t resist you
No way and no wise
Since the first time I saw you
in your Mother’s eyes.

In part your remind me
Of those I hold dear
the sound of your laughter
the salt of your tears.

The way your tongue curls
And mothers’ cannot
You’re a storehouse of traits
That I can’t do without.

Your voice raised in song
Can be heard in the rafters
Your song is a gift
Handed down from ancestors.

Like me you love humor
With a sarcastic wit
As often as not
you score direct hits

So while I still breathe
And still can remember
I love you dear child
and the sound of your laughter.

John F. McCullagh
The Stewards Of Destruction

The bird was routed from its nest
by the growl of a tractor’s roar.
Slash and burn, closer it came,
a tank in Mankind’s war.

The macaw soon was homeless
as its tree was knocked to earth.
Slash and burn, some peasants came
And hacked for all their worth

Elsewhere too, the Forest bears
brute evidence of man.
Slash and burn, the trees are gone
Crops planted there by hand.

Some miracle medicinals
Are forever lost down there
Slash and burn, fates’ wheel turns
Homo “sapiens” doesn’t care.

The habitats are dying
Their inhabitants are too.
Slash and burn, will man cause
his own extinction too?

John F. McCullagh
The Stone Carver

I am patient in my work. I take pride in what I do. I have no room to make mistakes that would, forever, be on view. I crouch before the stone with the dew still on the grass. I record the names and dates which are their only epitaphs. I've been at this work some time and I always work alone. For lives written on water I record their term in stone. Each gravestone holds a story of a life, once lived, now past. These lives of joy and sorrow which, though precious, do not last. Each one searching for their meaning, experienced alone, from the moment of conception until the day that they're called home. Some here had lived a century, others just a day, their entrances and exits incused for posterity. Fate, which is inexorable, brings everyone this way. to leave a stone upon a stone, to ponder and to pray

John F. McCullagh
The Stones Cry Out

From every county of old
Ireland
The stones have come to speak again.
Joined together in these four walls
They tell the tale of vanished men.
One million dead, the Hunger's harvest
A million more fled overseas.
The potatoes, on which they depended,
Lay rotting in the Irish fields
It was a hard death they endured;
Their sentence passed by falling yields.
The stones cry out, the stones remember
the shadows of the hunger slain.
They curse the British who dissembled
Who showed less mercy than the rain.
They cry out loudest for the children;
The bairns of that famished land.
Their mother's arms, their only coffins.
their sole possession was their names.

John F. McCullagh
The Story-Teller

When I was young,
and bedtime loomed,
my Father used to read to me;
stories from a wondrous book.
A Book that he alone could see.

From memory he'd recite poems
or tell of heroes doughty deeds.
Those stories shaped my mind and heart
as much as any faith or creed.

They were, of course,
the tales he'd heard
when mother had
sung him to sleep.
Stories run deep in our blood
the only treasures we can keep.

John F. McCullagh
The Strand*

I saw my father’s face last week,  
across the gulf of time..  
I chanced upon a photograph  
That you had left behind.

His hair shock white, his shoulders large  
from years of heavy toil,  
His eyes pale blue, his hands were rough  
from working with the soil.

I thought I saw his face again  
Across a crowded room  
It must have been a trick of light-  
a product of my gloom.

I saw my father’s face last night-  
within a vivid dream.  
We walked familiar streets of home  
in forty year old scenes.

Long vanished homes and people  
paraded through my head.  
I did not choose to break the mood  
or remind him he was dead.

I took my father’s hand last night  
We walked a moon lit shore.  
The beach’s sand was coarse and black  
the surf a subdued roar.

The land behind was all I know,  
But the Ocean beckoned me  
So together, hand in hand,  
We stepped into the sea.

***    ***    ***    ***

*• a poetic term for a shore (as the area periodically covered and uncovered by the tides)
There’s a stranger in my house
I have seen him mope around
In some fuzzy bedroom slippers
and a faded dressing gown.

He somehow seems familiar
Though I cannot place the face
My memory retrieval seems
lost without a trace

Every time I see him
He is staring back intently
As if he too is searching
for a clue within his memory.

This morning he was back again
In a faded emerald robe-
You know, I have one like it-
Did he steal it, you suppose?

But that can’t be, I’m wearing it
I look up with a start
What a curse are full length mirrors
to a senescent aging fart.

John F. McCullagh
The Stray

Her husbands’ death had come upon him quick.  
He’d always been so full of life and song.  
She’d had no warning that her Tom was sick.  
until he crumpled to the sidewalk and was gone.

The very day they put her husband in the ground,  
a Jet black Lab with no collar or license  
that she took to calling “Pepper” came around.  
“He must belong to someone.” was her sense.

She put up signs and Ads and asked around.  
She made inquiries to find the owner of the Lab.  
No one in town had seen the dog before  
the day they placed her man beneath the sod.

Pepper stayed faithfully at his mistress’ side  
They took long walks down Beachcomber Way  
Only Pepper heard the tears she cried  
and stayed by her till the sadness passed away

Three winters they passed in that little town,  
a town that made its living from the sea.  
Eventually she felt strong enough to work  
and re acclimate to life and company

As Spring’s warmth dissipates the winter gloom,  
Sadness cannot forever shadow hearts  
The heart is a perennial and so will bloom  
as soon as the snows of sorrow will depart.

Then, on the anniversary of the date  
the day they placed her husband in the ground,  
She called and called but Pepper didn’t come-  
The Jet black Lab was nowhere to be found.

She put up signs and Ads and asked around.  
She made inquiries to find her dog again.  
but no one ever saw the Lab in town.  
The stray will go where he is taken in.
John F. McCullagh
The Swarm

The fields were green; the sky clear blue, the land was fat and fair. 
Prosperity was all we knew, and poverty was rare. 
I looked with pride upon my fields, the ripening waves of grain, 
unaware, that in scant days, so little would remain.

A desert locust, by itself, is not a fearsome thing.
A swarm of eighty million is pure terror taking wing.
The swarm came out of Africa and descended on my fields. 
The sky was black with insects, the devastation was surreal.

The fields are black; the sky sad grey, the locusts' feast complete.
Like teenagers with the munchies, these little beasts can eat.
The crops that we had counted on now simply aren't there. 
These now are hungry desperate times and happiness is rare.

John F. McCullagh
The Sword And The Plowshare

Two objects lying in a field; a plowshare and a sword.
"Which of these gifts will they select?" pondered Mazda the Lord.
Two brothers, sons of Adam both, were passing by that way.
They spied the glittering artifacts that waited in the clay.
Hevel saw the plowshare would be great for planting seed in sod.
Qayin, the sword blade in his hand, looked at his brother odd.
Hevel was a Sheppard who minded Rams and Ewes.
Qayin grew crops and farmed the land, the only life he knew.
For Hevel to possess that gift did not sit well with Qayin
In a jealous rage he used the sword and thus Hevel was slain.
Qayin could not face his mother's eyes, with shame he bore his sin.
Of his free will he'd swung the blade that did his brother in.
Qayin buried Hevel in that field to keep wild dogs away.
Then with both glittering gifts in hand, Qayin wandered far away.
In time Man would perfect the objects first found in that field.
The weapon would proliferate, evolve from Bronze to steel.
The tears of Mother Eve still flow throughout recorded time
because we are the sons of Qayin and profit from his crime.

John F. McCullagh
The Tale Of The Two Tubby Tourists

The Pedicab drivers of Gotham all say
You should ignore a 'Whale Hail'
because it just doesn't pay.
The city is hilly and
to pedal gets tough
when your passengers are,
shall we say, overstuffed.

Two tubby tourists out on the town
between them they weighed about
Eight Hundred Pounds.
They had wiped out the Sushi
at an all you can eat.
Much too lazy to walk
on their overstressed feet.

They hailed for a Pedicab
of which there's a multitude
Thats the sole explanation
for accepting their pulchritude.

Their ride started slowly,
but pleasant enough.
But then came a hill
and the going got rough.

He groaned and he struggled
as he trucked up the road,
but not even juiced Armstrong
could handle this load.

With two tubby tourists
ensconced in the back.
He slowed to a crawl
then stalled in his tracks.

Something had to give
with those two in the rear
The cab then turned turtle
chucking him in the air.

The two tubby tourist
were down on their backs
Their driver unconscious
and two tires flat.

An Ambulance came
and gave him first aide
The two tourists rolled off
and he never got paid.

If we banned too large colas
and sixty ounce beers
could we hope that these
land whales
might, one day, disappear?

Until then its risky
to pick such fares up
unless in a limo
or a truck thats Ram tough

John F. McCullagh
The Temptation

We have many faces
but we are all the same:
the drudges of existence,
the drones in life's great game.
My best days are behind me,
my race is nearly run.
I get up for work each morning,
its been years since its been fun.
I am wedded to a woman
whose passion has grown cold.
I have worry lines around my eyes
to remind me I am old
* * * * *

I met this girl on Thursday,
The memory makes me hard:
Perhaps she was the Devil's snare,
Perhaps a gift from God.
Her perfume was alluring
Her hair brunette and long.
Her posture was inviting,
unless I read her wrong.
She'd been recently divorced
surely there's nothing wrong with that:
She had finally shed her man
and had yet to get a cat.

On my finger, a reminder,
a band of gold I saw.
to be yet another cheater
would offend me to the core.
So we chatted and had coffee
Cheek kissed in parting, nothing more.
Another battle won
in a nasty little war.

John F. McCullagh
The Ten Thousand

The Crust of the Earth Ruptured in a caldera.
The Sun blotted out by the ash and ejecta.
Dark lay the land in that perilous time.
way back before history had written a line.

The carnage terrific, there were deaths beyond count
When Starvation set in we saw casualties mount.
We came so close then to the end of our race.
There were ten thousand humans left on Earth's face.

These ten thousand survivors, the sad Remanent left
were fruitful and multiplied, at least that's a good guess.
At last count we numbered seven Billions or more.
We have plundered the land and polluted the shore.

I wonder when Yellowstone will rumble again.
It will blot out the stars and will threaten World's end.
But if some should survive and start over again
for the sake of Our Father please this time stay friends.

John F. McCullagh
The Thief Of Honor

The Thief of Honor

The Phony Hero, the fake marine with their stolen valor, bemedalled chests. These are the lowest of the low Who steal the honors of our best.

Those who never took the field Never came face to face with death. Presume to wear the highest honors And campaign ribbons on their chests.

True heroes lie in Arlington, Or in a hundred foreign fields Or else live quiet private lives’ And never boast about their deeds.

The thieves of honor think to gain high office from their pilfering. But they will only garner shame Once we expose their perfidy.

John F. McCullagh
The Thieves Of Honor

The Phony Hero, the fake marine
with stolen valor, bemedalled chests.
These are the lowest of the low
Who steal the honor due our best.

Those who never took the field
Who never had to face the foe
Common thieves usurp the medals
owed to men who lie in rows.

True heroes lie in Arlington,
Or in a hundred foreign fields
Or else live private quiet lives’
And never speak about their deeds.

The thieves of honor think to gain
high office by casuistry.
But they will only garner shame
Once we expose their perfidy.

John F. McCullagh
The Thin Red Line (October 25, 1854 Balaclava)

In that valley of death the Highlanders made their stand.
To live or die
but not retreat
in the Empire's hour of need.
The British redoubts had been overrun by the Russians
in the desperate morning fight.
If not for the brave men of the Ninety third
The allies would be put to flight.
The Russian Calvary with sabers slashing
came at them from all points.
The highlanders were not dismayed
by the sound of the Lancers steel.
The thin red line wavered but held
then drove them from the field.
Their courageous stand has been sadly forgotten.
They were passed over by the Press.
For that same day the Light Brigade
were led to the slaughter next.

John F. McCullagh
The Time Traveler

The time machine, itself, was old,
compact, yet seemingly vast.
It prepared now for the journey
The traveler thought would be his last.

Like a ghost in the machine
Lights glimmered, dimmed, then flared.
The time traveler breathed deeply,
nodded that he was prepared.

Back in his distant past he roamed,
back, to his childhood home.
A vanished place now only seen
in creased photos with sepia tones.

But no, the sky a remembered blue,
The white clapboarded home
The lawn, a rich lush emerald hue
and he was not alone.

For at the door his mother stood
as she was in her prime.
To see her once again was worth
all the world and time.

She beckoned him to join her
and she hugged her welcomed guest.
The traveler whispered “Mother”.
as so many have said at their last.

Back in the sterile I.C.U.
There were no vital signs.
The traveler had a D.N.R.
The nurse noted the time.

John F. McCullagh
The Timepiece- Todd Beamer's Watch

The crystal face is missing from this witness to the deed.
It doesn't have its' seconds hand, there is no longer need.
The date displays "11". That it always will
to remind us of the ways in which fanaticism kills.
I look upon Todd Beamer's watch and experience a chill,
realizing that while Time truly flies, it also can stand still.

John F. McCullagh
The Times Square Bomber

When death lurked just around the corner
My wife and I were sitting at a play.
Some immigrant –American was plotting
to turn Broadway into the great red way.

He'd parked his car bomb near the Times Square station
On foot, he bravely made his getaway
He took a rain check on the promised virgins-
So he might live to bomb another day.

Inside the playhouse buzzed with many rumors-
Why was the curtain held so long past eight?
It's unheard off to delay a Broadway curtain
just because some ticket-holders get there late.

You know the rest- the danger was discovered
The plot had fizzled, just like in our play
His car proved the star witness to convict him
He'll rot in jail until his dying day.

Then, when he dies and ventures up to heaven
and is greeted by the heavenly Houri.
There will be two and seventy intacto-
He'll have long since lost his own “virginity”

John F. McCullagh
The Toasts Of Ireland

Giants set the causeway stones
between our Isle and sea.
Saint Patrick drove the snakes away
and explained the Trinity.
Connolly and Pearse persuaded
Brits to set us free.
Some tales are myth, some are lore
And some are history.

The Irish make an Aran knit
With Celtic weaves sublime.
The Crystal made in Waterford
is elegant and refined.
In the past, flights of “Wild Geese”
Exported Ireland’s pride
Some think the future is Belleek
Others say Intel’s inside.

A pint of Guinness in a pub
can make a meal a treat.
Some prefer a Jameson’s
with its subtle hint of peat.
Others have a Smithwick’s
Some prefer a Bass.
My stated preference is Black Bush-
served neat in a glass.

John F. McCullagh
The Tower Of Siloam

There was a tower at Siloam
Joined with mud and built of stone
That mounted up toward the sky
flaws hidden from the naked eye.

The tower at Siloam fell-
taking eighteen lives to Hell.
It may have been three days of rain
That loosened joints and failed to drain

Rabbi was at Bethany
when word spread of this tragedy.
The prevailing view you may find odd:
The eighteen must have angered God.

Teacher did not share that view
that private sins had caused their fate.
They were no worse or better than
Those living still who stewed in hate.

The Sun shines both on slave and free
It shines on Romans as on Jews
On the evil and the righteous man,
upon the wolf, upon the lamb.

Random circumstances rule
outcomes for both small and great
but by his character a man
in words and deeds selects his fate

John F. McCullagh
The Transfiguration

When he rose to speak, I pitied him, that tall, ungainly, man.
His speech was high pitched, regional, but clear to understand.
An inner fire burned in him, his spirit fairly glowed.
His eyes and voice enchanted us despite his rustic clothes.
The constitution was his text; By chapter verse and line
He taught us what the founders meant, the thoughts that filled their minds.
He said a true Republican would not bid slaves to rise.
John Brown was no Republican, his actions were unwise.
He explained the Government could forbid slavery's spread.
The Union is a sacred trust and must be preserved, he said.
I felt my heart on fire when I heard him speak tonight.
When I saw his homely features Transfigured by the light.
This Lincoln must be reckoned with; if the South misunderstands, They'll be tears and lamentations in many homes in Dixie Land.

John F. McCullagh
The Trials Of Charlie Rangel

Twenty terms in Congress’ halls-
Our Charlie doesn’t lack for balls!
His pay and pension are the best.
Still he needs feather his own nest.

Rent stabilized apartments are
intended for the working poor
Can somebody explain to me
why Charlie Rangel rented four.

As chairman of the Ways and Means
He ran it like a den of thieves
His own tax he fails to pay
then burdens us to save the day.

His vacations are among the finest
Lobbyist paid- but don’t remind us.
He has a grand vacation home
Don’t ask whence he obtained the loan.

He lies, he cheats, he evades taxes
When questioned on his ethical lapses
He’s sure to play the racial card-
How tired is that old canard

The obligation to disclose
He’s sure is meant for lesser Joes
If Ethicists should raise a fuss
He’ll throw his staff under the bus.

Charlie in charge of Ways and Means
His ways obscure his means unseen
Now they say they’ll have a trial
force Charlie to divest his pile.

John F. McCullagh
The Tribe Has Spoken

When they walked along the trail of tears
The freedmen toted gear.
These blacks, who once were owned as slaves,
would be tribemen, it appeared.
One hundred and thirty years have passed,
The Cherokee think it time
for a parting of the ways-
voting blacks out of their tribe.
Would Jeff Probst approve of this?
Would Survivor film the vote?
Casino money must be at stake.
It's quite the slippery slope.
Black Cherokees have been deprived
of their slice of change and hope.
Voted out of the tribe,
forced off the reservation
I understand Black Cherokees’
chagrin and consternation.

John F. McCullagh
The Turing Machine

I'm not considered "normal" by policemen on the force. They apprehended me in public having anal intercourse. From early on I've always been attracted to a certain sort of man. I've tried to be with women but that's not just who I am.

Condemned as an "abnormal", my security clearance lost, considered an Enigma and somewhat an albatross. In war I was a hero in the cryptanalytic game. Now those doors are closed to me and others just the same.

So much I have accomplished, yet much remains undone. Their chemicals have unmanned me so this capsule on my tongue. Once crushed with bring oblivion with its bitter almond taste. The destruction of a once great man, will someone rue the waste?

John F. McCullagh
The Uncivil War

Let our country produce no more exceptional men;
at least none worth remembering in Bronze or Stone.
The American Taliban has declared war on the past;
Since those men are dead, their statues must atone.

So pull down their monuments and leave the empty plinths.
Efface their names from parks and roads and forts.
Gutzon Borglum offends us with his carvings.
'Demolish Stone Mountain! ' the Taliban retorts.

The day will come when Stonewall is just a bar
Where tops and bottoms battled with police.
Foote, Catton and McPherson must be burned,
with all other books about that war and peace.

An army of ants can bring an elephant down.
An army of ignorance can drag down old heroes.
When America is exceptional no more
All will be equal; all men will be zeros.

John F. McCullagh
The Vessel

The Vessel was a thing of clay.  
the sort you use, then throw away.  
It was worth little, of itself,  
but that vessel was filled with Love.  
It poured out Love upon the Living  
Free and selfless was its giving.  
When at last the clay was dry,  
it was the vessels time to die.  
It shattered on the sands of time,  
now half a lifetime gone from mine.  
The vessel was my Dad you see-  
and by his gifts I was set free.  
I wept the day he met his end-  
will I ever see his like again?  
God willing on a higher plane  
I'll get to call again his name.,  
but if my journey ends in dust,  
he taught me how as all men must.

John F. McCullagh
The Visit

I went to visit you the other day,  
a bunch of fresh cut flowers in my hand.  
I only had a little time to spend-  
Still you, I think, were glad to have me there.

I spoke about my troubles in your presence  
You listen with an ever patient ear  
You remind me that all trials are transient  
That nothing dries as quickly as a tear.

Now that you and Mom are back together-  
I can’t believe already it’s a year-  
As often happens with long married hearts.  
Does nothing dry as quickly as a tear?

With pain, I raise myself up from my knee  
I say farewell with none around to hear  
It’s just a lie we tell ourselves, my Da  
That nothing dries as quickly as a tear.

John F. McCullagh
The Wings Of The Morning

It is quiet, even peaceful here,
out past Hana on Maui’s Isle.
Near Palapala Ho'omau Church,
This is where I have come to bide.
To listen to the Ocean’s roar,
to find what peace is left to me.
I could not hide from you, oh Lord
Not in the uttermost depths of the sea
My time is fast approaching when
I will lose this quarrel with disease.
The air is warm and liquid here,
It has a perfumed fragrance that
would bid a younger man to stay.
but Cancer bids me to fade away
As I will, I’ve seen the stone,
simple enough to mark my space
In the Churches’ graveyard here
my friend Sam has made a place
I recall, when youth was dawning,
You gave me the Wings of the Morning.
Was it simple vanity
that made me venture the unconquered sea.
I took off from Roosevelt field alone
and touched down in Paris, far from home.
Now I am far from home again,
See where Death approaches, like a friend.

John F. McCullagh
The Wisdom Of Solomon

An old and tattered Bible Is the crux of a dispute.
Bernice King has possession of what her brothers see as loot.
The book was dear to Doctor King thru trials and tribulations
And with him on the Selma march in the days that changed the nation.
To her; a priceless heirloom of King's Dream to equalize.
To her brothers it's an asset that they hope to monetize.
This book, signed by the President, is not a tawdry prize
to be bought by some collector and hid from others eyes.
So now there is a lawsuit and I hope the judge is wise
Wise as a modern Solomon in how he will decide.
This Bible is a legacy, inspired word and proof
Of what one man can accomplish when addicted to the Truth.

John F. McCullagh
I was present at the trial
when Marcus Tullius took the stage
To defend a man accused, by you,
of poisoning and outrage.
I tried to hide a smile
when he all but called you 'Whore'.
He painted Caelius as some innocent
that you lured to your door.
He defined you as a harlot
though he barely spoke your name.
He next implied your brother
was your spouse in all but name.
He acknowledged your nobility
and then outlined your shame.
He all but stripped you naked,
He's a master of the game.
The rumors of your drunkenness
last summer at the shore.
The long parade of Lovers
while your husband was at war.
His porcine face was damp with sweat
but his eyes betrayed his glee.
that you, the State's star witness,
were stripped of credibility

John F. McCullagh
The Woman from the Well

On Spring Street in SOHO I worked in a bar
The Manhattan Bistro, since closed down, I hear.
In its basement what remains of a well can be seen;
the scene of a murder that still haunts my dreams.

The Winter solstice was, once again, drawing near,
its night, cold and dreary, the longest of the year.
What brought me downstairs, I cannot now tell.
It was there that I saw her, the woman from the well.

Her long tresses hung down; limp, lifeless and dead,
and an old fashioned hair comb she wore on her head.
Her muslin dress was archaic, with bustle and lace.
She seemed lonely and listless, a sad look on her face.

In life she'd been lovely, a pert Twenty two.
Yes, Elma Sands, I'd heard all about you.
As I stood in stunned silence, another appeared.
A malevolent Specter of a man passed me near.

He throttled the girl till, unconscious, she fell.
He tossed her, still living, down the depths of the well.
Then like vapors they vanished- to Heaven or Hell?
Someone called from the Bar and it shattered the spell.

Few heard her pleas on the night that she died.
When she first was discovered it was thought suicide.
Rumors spread quickly back in Old Dutch New York.
Surely that girl was murdered, such was the talk.

No doubt killed by a Lover who wanted no Bride.
Levi Weeks was arrested. The charge- Homicide.
Rumors were spread that he'd promised they'd wed,
That they planned to elope- but he'd killed her instead.

The Lawyers he hired were both men of renown;
Hamilton and Burr were both heroes in town.
The mob wanted blood; they screamed Levi's name. 
The jury declined to convict, just the same.

The facts of the murder may never be known. 
What man followed Elma, and found her alone, 
In a meadow deserted on the outskirts of town? 
What man took her life, which was not his to take, 
when she bravely refused to consent to her rape?

In the heart of our city, her ghost finds no peace; 
Two centuries later and still no release. 
Venture down to the cellar on Spring Street if you dare; 
On the Solstice her ghost will appear to you there

John F. McCullagh
The Wood Handled Shovel

I take its smooth wood in my hands
to turn the earth as spring returns.
I make straight furrows in my garden
Like those before me worked the land.

This was Dad's shovel years ago
And in my father's callused hands
it coaxed our plot to yield us fruit
as good as any farmer's stand.

Outside of faded photographs
So few of father's things remain
His house torn down, his stuff dispersed.
his kingdom shrunken to a grave.

Of all the things that I possess
this little shovel made of wood
is my link to Him I loved
and to a time when life was good.

J.M.

John F. McCullagh
The Wrath Of Grapes

Karma finds you eventually,
Sometimes while drinking a fine Chablis.
George Zimmerman is back in the news,
with sour grapes that left a bruise.
His girlfriend wouldn't kneel to play
so he bopped her with un Beaujolais!
His poor girlfriend, clad in a slip,
He christened like a navy ship.
Aggrieved assault is the charge he'll face
since cops were called out to his place.
He can't resort to "Stand your Ground";
His prints were on the bottle found.
Off to jail, George, where, they say,
You'll meet your true love every day.

John F. McCullagh
Their Final Exam

here was only one question on their final exam.
The Buddhists were wounded, the Muslims were spared.
To deny Christ; so easy, to bear witness; so hard,
What would they answer; those about to meet God?
Would they lie to be "saved"? or lie down in the sod.
Nine souls were dispatched with a shot to the head,
before police shot their interrogator dead.
Nine people bore witness to the Cross at their death.
They wouldn’t deny Him with their final breath.
American Martyrs bore Him witness, you see.
If you took this exam what would your answer be?

John F. McCullagh
Their Final Parting

These two had parted once before
when he'd worked in Scotland's mines.
Now he trekked to the antipodes
to live in southern climes.
He'd see the Emerald isle no more.
Would New Zealand be as fair?
He'd build a new life far from home,
Adventure waited there.
Yet, to never see his home again,
Or hear his mother's voice.
To venture from the Troubled North
was his necessary choice.
Yet home will never look so fair
As when its left behind,
He'd live and die in a far off land
as part of God's design.
"I never will forget you, Mum."
as sorrow choked his throat.
One final hug and then he turned
to get upon the boat.
His ship made way down Belfast Lough
And he watched her from the rail
Til distance made her disappear
as if one beyond the vale.

John F. McCullagh
Then And Now

I look upon the Fields of France
and see her scars a century old.
The fading craters made by shells;
the trench lines where they fought and died.
No star shells now disturb the night
No need to fumble for gas masks.
No 'No-man's Land' between the wires.
No butchery mars these fields of France.

In Nineteen Fourteen, in July
with declarations by old men,
A generation went to war
and most would not see home again.
In muddy trenches rats grew fat.
Whistles sounded the hopeless charge.
Machine guns made a mince of men.
at Verdun, alone, a million dead.

This is now and that was then,
but this is, in truth, a fragile peace.
Hatred simmers, oaths are sworn,
I sense the battle lines are drawn.
The lamp lights flicker now as then.
Will butchery mar these fields again?

John F. McCullagh
There Used To Be A Ballpark Here

The Ghosts of Ruth and Gehrig sat
Up in Tier 35
And wiped tears from translucent cheeks
As the final anthem died.

DiMaggio brought the popcorn
The Mick supplied the beer
He bought it up in heaven
Cause it’s cheaper there than here.

“An epic game”, the Babe enthused
“The best I ever saw”
he chowed down on some hot dogs
And looked around for more.

Gehrig glanced out at his bat
Atop the center pole
And wished to get it in his hands
And feel its weight once more.

“I had a streak in 41’ the longest in the game”
Then DiMaggio fell silent and turned to watch the game
“I did my best in 56’”Mantle then exclaimed
“I wonder what I could have been if both my legs were game”

Mystique and Aura, Saucy things
Each dancing at a pole
As Derek with his broken hand
drove a single through the hole.

Pettite our left handed ace
Dealt his greatest game
Glaring out beneath his cap-
His hate for batters plain.

The autumn sky had turned to black
When Mo entered the game
The Sandman tune was soon drowned out
By the faithful who remain.
Robert Merrill sang, and then Kate Smith sang
Then Sinatra one last time
Singers for the requiem
Living need not apply!

The Ghosts of Ruth and Gehrig sat
Up in Tier 35
And wiped tears from translucent cheeks
As the music died

"I wonder if we’ll feel the pain
When they wield the wrecking ball
I wonder if our hearts will break
When they breech the wall."

"Fear not, dear friend, the Stadium’s end
For if steel and concrete fall
The Stadium lives in our hearts
Whenever we recall."

The fans left standing in the street
On River Avenue
These corporate types in Luxury suites
Have little thought for you

Our paradise is lost tonight
Our little patch of green
But what a life we lived in there
The greatness we have seen.

John F. McCullagh
There's A Pill For That

The learned Dons of Oxford
Have invented and refined
An efficacious compound;
Love Potion number nine.

A heady mix of pheromones
and vitamins and such.
Just give it to your blasé mate
And she'll hunger for your touch.

Oxytocin warms her heart
and bonds her to your side.
Testosterone's included
So she's randy as a bride.

A simple pill upon her tongue
And passion is restored.
A boon for long time couples
Rather lacking in Amor.

Just be sure to stay at home
when she ingests the pill.
If you don't make yourself available
The mailman can and will.

John F. McCullagh
They Called Me Bruce

Once, back in the day, when you were still teens,
I won the decathlon, a pole vaulting fiend.
On bright orange boxes my face could be seen.
It seemed like I was living the American dream.

Yet my role as a hero was all just a pose.
I never felt comfortable wearing men’s clothes.
I longed for the feel of lace upon skin.
I just didn’t belong in the body I’m in.

I longed to be pretty, I needed a change-
with money no object that could be arranged.
Hormonal treatments would help my boobs blossom
They made my skin soft and they rounded my bottom.

Now in stockings and gingham I’m making the scene,
The thing I’ve most wanted since I was a teen.
Those parts that defined me- now surgically gone,
I just don’t know whether to scratch or to yawn.

John F. McCullagh
They Came For The Beer

There were six of them, officer.
Each 800 pounds.
They had horns on their heads
and they moo'd mean and loud.
They trampled my gate,
made a mess of my pond
then they scattered my guests
and the party was on!
They tipped over the table
that held all the beer.
smashed the cans with their hooves
and they lapped up the cheer.
With the smell of their relatives
seared on the grill
I thought after their keeger
they'd be out for the kill.
I banged on my garbage pails
desperately thinking
The noise would stampede
these fat heifers out drinking.
They finished the Bud I had
bought at the store.
Then they sent my dog 'here we go'
looking for more.
Your police car's loud sirens
put the bovines to flight
and they disappeared
drunkenly into the night.
Believe me Officer
I know what your thinking
but truly and honestly
I haven't been drinking

much

John F. McCullagh
Thigh Way (Song Parody Of 'My Way')

to the tune of 'MY Way'

And now, my weigh-ins near;
Weight watchers made such a big production
I've cheated, had a few beers
then gotten quotes for liposuction

I've eaten way past full
and then had one more for the highway
I've gotten old, I've gotten fat
don't diet my way!

Baguettes, I've had a few, but then again, too few to mention
I love my salty snacks
but that's what gave me hypertension

I planned each 3 course meal
at greasy spoons along the highway
I've gotten old
I've gotten fat
don't diet my way

Yes there were times when I was blue
Ice cream in quarts, I would go through
but through it all, despite the gout
I'd eat it in, or take it out
I ate it all, - and I'm not tall
don't diet my way

I've lunched, I've wined and dined
I've had my failed attempts at losing
but now my jeans just split
and it no longer seems amusing.

To think I ate it all
and may I say not in a shy way
I've gotten old, I've gotten fat
don't diet my way

For what is a meal without cake for desert
and JOGGING IS DANGEROUS - a guy could get hurt
I ate the foods I truly craved
and never once was fashion's slave
The weight-in shows, I need new clothes
don't diet my way!

John F. McCullagh
Thirteen Steps

My eyes, unblinking, are raised towards the sky.
I'm just a man in an ordinary suit.
Thirteen stairs for me to climb,
Thirteen steps till I wear the noose.
I've been condemned for the crimes of others.
This is my sacrificial feast.
My emperor lives and reigns in splendor.
This war ends in a bitter peace.
My loving wife had predeceased me.
I am resigned now to my fate.
As the hemp rope chokes my life out
I hope, my Love, to see your face.
Thirteen steps, I must not trip.
A stumble here would be disgrace.
I face my death with calm and courage.
This day will bring no loss of face.
I was just a man in an ordinary suit
In the wrong seat, at the wrong time,
in the wrong place.

John F. McCullagh
This Child Of Bethlehem

This child will teach us how to love, and let us hope again.
This child draws nurture from a girl, protectiveness from man.
This child can make a family where there was none before, and make us crave the crafts of peace and not the arts of war.

This child, now born, will change the world from mundane to Divine.
The wisdom of this innocent trumps all the years of mine.

John F. McCullagh
Thoughts And Prayers

We thank you for your thoughts and prayers;
your inspiring moments of silence.
Yet these do not one blessed thing
to protect us from gun violence.

The constitution guarantees
the right to lethal Weapons?
Are Life and Liberty not worthy, then,
of sensible protections?

Those diagnosed with PTSD;
The schizophrenic and Bi Polar
Should not be given lethal means
to wipe out holy rollers.

We thank you for your thoughts and prayers
We're sure they're well intended.
Just the same we'd like to see
These brutal massacres ended!

John F. McCullagh
The water had risen to just below the brim and cracks were observed along the poured concrete rim. For days now such troubling signs had appeared; The Dam Keeper had expressed concerns, then been told not to fear. The Chief engineer had come up and opined that the mighty Dam's walls would stand all tests of time.

Down there in the valley with the last of the light The ranchers and their families bedded down for the night. Their ignorance was bliss for no one foresaw That flood waters obey an immutable law.

The Saint Francis Dam in the San Francisquito Valley Was about to give way. There'd be no time to dally. At three minutes to midnight came an unearthly sound; Twelve Billion gallons of water knocked the dam down.

Bodies and boulders, stone structures and trees Formed a wave of destruction that raced for the sea A mighty Tsunami; a hundred feet high All those in its way were those destined to die.

Man, in his hubris, seems always to feel That he is the master to whom Nature must yield. Yet, in reality, we are helpless and small; Overcome by flood waters we are nothing at all.

Mulholland, the department head shouldered the blame. Bravely I think- Who today would do the same? The ruins of Saint Francis Dam still stand to remind us That our works are ephemeral; history serves to remind us.

Our land's infrastructure is in need of repair. We must not wait for more cracks to appear. The innocent suffer if we fail to heed this call. Its three minutes to midnight for us one and all.

John F. McCullagh
Three Women

They sit straight in a row, like jackdaws on a line; three women, garbed in black, on uncomfortable metal chairs. They speak in low murmuring voices. Their eyes are fixed upon the burnished Bronze casket at the front of the chapel. The casket that contains All that remains of the cancer riddled ruin of a man. Their eyes are downcast, their ankles tightly crossed. They have come to console their sister for her loss. She is one of them now; she has joined in their number. Indifferent wives make excellent widows.

John F. McCullagh
Tiger, The Final Chapter

It's official, the divorce is now final.
Tiger and Elin are through.
He gets the payments, she gets the house.
Same deal for the Mercedes too.

She will care take their two children
for a monthly exorbitant fee.
It sure beats her pay as a nanny,
which was her job status quo ante.

Tiger retains his equipment:
By that I mean both bag and balls,
and such clubs as survived Last Thanksgiving
when Elin 'played thru' on the lawn.

He has custody of his faithful caddy,
and visits the kids when in town-
back in the mansion he once could call home
ere he got caught 'catting around'.

John F. McCullagh
Tiger's Apology

Thank you, friends, for coming here, and sitting quietly, While I read the sixteenth draft of my apology.

I’m sorry that I hurt my Mom, my fellow pros on tour, my charitable foundation too, by thoughts and deeds impure.

I’m sorry that I let you down. These last three months were tough I’ve entered into therapy to curb my taste for muff.

It’s truly my entire fault. There’s no one else to blame. Not one of those platoon of Ho’s Who’ve cashed in on my name

I cannot blame my lovely wife- Did you notice she’s not here.- She had to get the kids at school While dressed in Nike gear.

There’s been no domestic violence. Let me make that quite clear There’s been no domestic anything since Turkey day last year.

I’m sad my Caddy’s unemployed And can’t help shoulder Blame. I’m sorry for the sponsorships I’ve watched go down the drain

My therapist is curing me of my mad lust for strange. My favorite hole is on the course My home is on the range
I will return to golf one day
and play a round, I’m sure,
I’ll tee it up with Ernie Els
once I’m back on the tour.

John F. McCullagh
Time And Love

Of Time and Love- those gifts you gave-
   Only memories may I save.
Although I have a goodly store
   Don’t call me greedy for wanting more.

Those other gifts you made for me-
   A home and loving family-
I hold them close about me now
   that my love has out lived our vow.

With you, dear love, I saw the world
   Not half bad for a Bronx bred girl
    Yet I would yield the world and more
   If Time, that thief, gave us encore..

Time will heal my wounds, I trust-
   Only when I too am dust.
    With tear dimmed eyes I bid farewell
   to you who loved me long and well.

John F. McCullagh
Time In A Bottle

You cannot save time in a bottle,
that's not something a bottle can do.
Sure, time can be lost there
and loves are divorced there-
but saving time, bottles can't do.

For those who spend time in a bottle
will wonder where time has got to.
Time won't be found there,
perhaps a good wine there
is sufficient to compensate you.

And as for 'the box made for wishes
and dreams that will never come true.'
They will put you inside
and there you will bide
till Gabriel's playing for you.

You cannot keep time in a bottle
experience taught me that's true.
Perhaps whiskey or rye
and a slow way to die
but time will not stand still for you.

John F. McCullagh
To A Violent Grave

He was certainly buzzed,
Drunk, a better word,
When his convertibles wheel
Struck a tree near the curb..
A woman’s scream;
then silence, shock.
He whispered her name
But no one answered back.

The artist was dying,
But still he observed:
The drip, drip, of his blood
Onto asphalt that’s cracked.
Death imitates art.
Now break, gentle heart.
Sirens sound in the distance
a bright light in the dark.
As all neurons fired
in search of a spark.

John F. McCullagh
To Be Forever Young

No, you will not hear him anymore.  
belting out a Broadway score.  
You would wait forever  
before he walks through that door.  
Cory’s golden voice is silenced,  
because he was tempted and succumbed.  
That often is the price one pays  
to be forever young.

John F. McCullagh
To Hell Or Connacht

Once upon a time
in a nasty little war
Cromwell came to Ireland
like a blight upon our shore.

He waged war upon my people
in a genocidal style
but some revisionists might argue
he was merciful and mild.

At Drogheda he killed thousands,
what a slaughter that place saw,
at the hands of 'Christian' soldiers-
surely righteous was their cause.

Then, when the war was over
and all our blood was spent
the Gaels, who used to own the land,
all wound up paying rent

' To Hell or Connacht' is a phrase
sound biters did invent
I don't know if he uttered it
but its surely what he meant!

John F. McCullagh
To See, Again, The Stars

The cold was penetrating
within their shattered room.
Grandmother was bedridden
She could not be moved.
Her sixteen year old Grandson
Brought food that he had scrounged
For nine days they were trapped there,
buried beneath the mound.
All around the cries grew weaker,
Fainter, fainter then died down.

For nine days they were buried
In the wreckage of their home.
They were the sole survivors
Enduring there alone.

His father never gave up hope
That they would be found alive.
Their rescue made news worldwide
It was tears of joy he cried.
They emerged into the twilight
Of a sunset, bloody red.
Two saved, out of ten thousand,
Spared, to see the Stars Again.

John F. McCullagh
To The Last Man

Sickles' corps had broken; the Rebels had them on the run.
Hancock foresaw disaster; perhaps a worse one than Bull Run
How could he plug the gap in the line and rally men to stand?
"What Regiment is this?" he asked of Colville, in command.
The First Minnesota volunteers- they were sorely undermanned.
They were Lincoln's first volunteers, staunch Union men in Blue
Hancock ordered them to charge; a death sentence, they knew.
With bayonets fixed they made their charge outnumbered twelve to Two.

The Rebel regiments were shocked, disbelieving what they saw;
The company sized regiment who'd come through three years of war.
Canister ripped through their lines; there was no time to weep.
Five minutes Hancock needed; for that long their grief would keep.

This field knows many heroes; so many fought and bled.
But let us pause and honor these brave Minnesota dead.
They bought time for the General; the Union held the Ridge.
We might not have a country had they not done what they did.

John F. McCullagh
To The Lat

Of all who ever were or been.
Of all who breathed in hope of sin.
Frank Buckles was the last of all
the Doughboys, and the last to fall.

He enlisted while still underage
Was “over there” by seventeen.
Then was prisoner of the Japanese
During World War Two in the Philippines.
A decade and a century
A long and eventful life he led.

After the battle had been won
He walked among the newly dead
He took from one an unused week,
from another, an unused day in spring.
From his colonel, a month he’d never see
Thus Frank amassed his century.

At the end he was a living ghost
His wrinkled skin thin, parchment- like
If those ignorant armies were like a blizzard
He was the last soiled speck of white.

John F. McCullagh
Tom Brady's Balls

It's the week before the Super Bowl,  
where the Patriots and Sea hawks will meet,  
and all that folks are talking about  
is Bill and Tom's softball deceit.

It's cold up North this time of year  
when the Patriots made their playoff run.  
Snow and ice require gloves;  
If footballs slip, they'd be undone.

"Taking the air out of the ball;"  
Once referred to the running game.  
Deflated balls are easy to grip  
But it's cheating, that much is plain.

It seems the balls that Brady used  
spiraled nicely through the rain.  
When you balls are small and soft,  
Like Brady's, it's a different game.

When Tom was asked about the scheme  
He laughed at first and wouldn't tell.  
The truth about Tom Brady's balls  
is closely guarded by Gisele.

John F. McCullagh
Total Eclipse

In the presence of the enemy
He split his force in two.
His red coated invaders
displayed contempt for the Zulu.
How else to explain their failure
to fortify the camp?
Twenty Thousand warriors
Put them in a deadly clamp.
It was a fearsome slaughter
redcoats falling by the score.
Thirteen hundred swept away-
No prisoners of war.
assegai thrusting spears struck home
The Sun would shine no more.
The Thin Red Line was broken,
each man fighting his own war.
With ammunition running out
They fought with blade and butt.
Until knobkierrie clubs struck home
And stabbing spears found gut.
The officers with horses,
without honor, fled the fray.
Escaping only with their lives
No storied heroes they.

John F. McCullagh
Towers, A Nine Eleven Poem

In my minds geography
The towers still stand tall.
They rise up from their common grave
And overawe the shore

Above the clouds the diners feast
At windows on the World
as swarms of chefs and waiters
hang on their every word

In my mind's eye, no bells need toll
As mourners read a name.
No firemen in bunker gear
race up the stairs in vain.

With eyes wide closed
Deny, deny, the fast approaching planes
Deny the bodies in the street
Deny the dust and flames

But they are gone and you are gone
And never will I hear
Your soft and sexy gentle voice
Or hold your body near

Late at night near Trinity
among the weathered stones
Do I hear the weeping of lost souls
-Or is it just the wind 's low moan?

John F. McCullagh
Transient Immortal

Tommorrow is on my calendar
as is every day next week.
I have interviews, appointments,
Dinners at which I'll speak.

I'll make some time for family
and writing, I suppose.
I may find time to barbecue
and to launder my work clothes.

When evening comes I'll settle back
with a glass of Pinot noir.
I'm a transient immortal,
I'm on loan here from a star.

The future is a game;
against ourselves we play.
We act as if we still have left
forever and a day.

In truth we all are transients
For just this moment free.
Self observing stardust
poised t'wixt two eternities

John F. McCullagh
Triangle  (03-25-1911)

Triangle

I will never forget the sound
of their bodies as they hit the ground.
How the gutter ran red with their blood
when no other escape could be found.

Our ladders were too short, you see-
They were eight floors from the ground.
All these young factory girls
like bundles of rags falling down.

I will always remember the screams
Of one girl with flames in her hair
who appeared at a window one moment,
then in the next, wasn’t there.

I walked through the ashes soon after
trying to make sense of things.
We counted three dozen more victims
and discovered a number of rings.

It started here on the eighth floor;
a stray ash from a last cigarette.
There was plenty of fuel for the fire
That this city will never forget.

John F. McCullagh
True Confessions

In my youth I was often told
That confession is good,
good for the soul.
In a darkened wooden booth
I was expected to tell the truth.
First a good act of contrition,
Confession and then absolution
Penance would be meted out
Thus expiation came about.

Nowadays that’s thought
Old fashioned.
My local barkeep
hears my confession.
Of course he grants no absolution,
He pours Absinthe
and shows compassion.
And I may or may not
Tell the truth
While contemplating
The Absolute.

John F. McCullagh
Turning Leaf

The fallen leaves of red and gold await me and my rake.
As I am in a reflective mood, they’ll simply have to wait.
I am in my sixties now, my body feels the cold.
I know I am no longer young, yet I do not feel that old.
I admire nature’s bold broad strokes; these brightly colored leaves.
(I would enjoy them twice as much if I didn’t have to clean)
Soon I’ll have them raked and bagged for the garbage man to take.
We used to burn them in years gone by, but that was a mistake.
I remember, as a child, jumping in the leafy mounds.
They yelled at me, my parents, but I suspect that they had grounds.
Now in the autumn of my life, on this crisp October morn,
My life’s choices have all been made and all my children born.
Time, surely I must yet have time to sing the song of life.
It’s time now to enjoy our quiet house, just me and my wife.
A time when I’ll compose my verse, time to taste the wine.
Yet who among us can be sure they’re not on borrowed time.
Should I fall, prematurely, like these leaves of gold and red,
I hope all I have loved in life speak kindly of the dead.

John F. McCullagh
Twenty One Steps

Despite the wind and driving rain,
At their posts they must remain.
In woolen garb and white glove dress,
Twenty one steps, no more no less.
They honor those who came before
Who, unnamed, fell in foreign wars
Entombed forever far from home
in their sarcophagus of stone.
For duty and honor they remain
Despite the wind, despite the rain.

John F. McCullagh
Twenty Seven!

We entered last night at gate four,
the precious tickets in our hands.
The Anthem’s ending drowned in cheers
as we took seats high in the stands.

“Godzilla “had a monster night.
He was a one man wrecking crew.
Pedro couldn’t get him out.
Nothing really he could do.

Here and there the Phillies tried
To stage a rally, beat the best.
But Andy always held them down
while pitching on just three days rest.

When “enter Sandman” starts to play
It’s like a Frank Sinatra score:
Game over for thePhillies’ reign
They weren’t coming back, down four.

A happy meeting at the mound,
once Victorino grounded out
As coaches, players stormed the field
from the first base side dugout.

Flags and pennants, banners wave
And Modell’s opens up the store
Faithful fans behold the prize
Like early Christians filled with awe.

John F. McCullagh
Twilight

The shadows creep towards the mound.
The late September air is crisp.
No bunting will be hung this year,
Our team is old and in eclipse.

In the box the batter waits.
His knees are sore, his bat grown slow.
In his time he was a champion.
In his heart he knows it's time to go.

How quickly do the seasons change
from youthful promise to aged despair.
You start out as a diamond star
And end up in a rocking chair.

Baseball is an old man's love,
each Spring bringing hope of glory.
Yet it is not an old man's game.
That's quite a different story.

The stadium this day, half full,
and ready for the wrecking ball.
Mickey Charles Mantle has flied to right
and joined the legions of the Fall.

John F. McCullagh
Twin Towers

When I was but a tiny child
Back when the world was new
My parents like twin towers stood
And everything was true

My father died at Eighty one
Peacefully asleep
My mother lived ten years alone
In the house up from main Street

The Century turned over then
In the new millennium
When Mother in the nursing home
reached her journey’s end.

Your first impulse must be to cry
When towers fall, when people die
If Brick and stone- you build anew
If of flesh- the monument is you.

John F. McCullagh
Twin Towers In The Clouds

They rose above the Clouds
as my charter passed downtown.
An April day dawning,
thirty thousand feet from ground.
It was as if they, alone, had been spared
And all New York was gone.

The future was quite different,
Something I could not have known.
Two other planes approaching
on a clear September morn.
changed utterly, the world;
Twin Towers, smoking, gone.

The death of one or several men
Might barely give us pause,
but as we read two thousand names
We’re still fighting two wars.
Peace continues to elude us
No matter whom we catch or kill.

Sometimes, in dreams, I think I see
the towers standing still.
But in the cold grey light of morning
I know I never will.

John F. McCullagh
Tyler Clemente

At the railing of the bridge,
the water far below.
One step and there is no return-
I fall if I let go.

Standing at the railing now
The cold rain drenches me
And hides these tears upon my face
The world will never see.

One step into eternity-
What stops me letting go?
Such an easy thing to die-
until it's time to go.

Yet why remain to face the shame?
My tormentors are free.
They used a web cam to record
my lover kissing me.

They outed me to all the world
My friends and family know.
How then could I remain at school?
I'm left no place to go.

My phone and wallet on the grate
for the officers to find..
I hope the two who did this thing
are punished for their crime.

Tyler Clemente, a closeted gay man and student at Rutgers University, committed suicide on 09/29/2010 by leaping to his death from the George Washington Bridge. Two fellow students are charged with crimes related to invasion of privacy

John F. McCullagh
The sheets were still warm
from her last fleeting kiss,
Redolent of the perfume she wore.
Surely the memories of nights such as this
are what our existence is for.
They had met on the train
which was not at all strange;
they had noticed each other before.
That he shared his umbrella
and later, his bed
was a gift of the evening's hard rain.
Her skin was sun kissed
and she had bee stung lips.
Her eyes, a mischievous green.
True, she had an umbrella,
but why tell the fellow
she happened to meet on the train.
Let him think he had conquered,
It was she who had stooped.
Perhaps she would see him again.
She had left him asleep,
slipping out like a thief from
a night filled with Love and Champagne.
She did not regret
letting herself get wet.
as it led him to act as her swain.
He'd been tender and sweet
and his taste was a treat
once they'd come in from the rain.

John F. McCullagh
There are those who prefer to live on their knees when others would die on their feet,
Chabu is dead, but his words still resound, like the echo of shots on the street.
He was a free man with no child and no wife. No attachments can be a mercy.
A man who has paid for his thoughts with his life is a martyr who sets others free.
Vengeance is natural and there are those who will spit on these gunmen and curse.
In the showdown between "faith" and ideas, the artist will always draw first.

Il ya ceux qui préfèrent vivre sur leurs genoux quand les autres mourraient sur leurs pieds,
Chabu est mort, mais ses paroles résonnent encore, comme l'écho de coups de feu dans la rue.
Il était un homme libre sans enfants et pas de femme. Pas de pièces jointes peuvent être une miséricorde.
Un homme qui a payé pour ses pensées de sa vie est un martyr qui met les autres libres.
Vengeance est naturel et il ya ceux qui vont cracher sur ces hommes armés et malédiction.
Dans la confrontation entre «foi» et des idées, l'artiste puisera toujours en premier.

John F. McCullagh
Uncommon Valor

"Clear the way, boys, clear the way" said Meagher astride his steed. The fighting sixty-ninth stepped forth, they were not afraid to bleed. Upon St Marye's heights Cobb's Georgians waited, behind a low stone wall. The lads attacked that stout defense - how senseless was it all. There were Irish too up on the hill and they saw the Emerald flag. "Oh God, what a pity! Here come Meagher's fellows" one Irish rebel said,

But all obeyed the order given; to fill the air with lead. The sixty-ninth could not reply, they all carried antique stock. Muskets are no match for rifles at the distance they attacked. They climbed that rise into a storm of canister and shot. They got as close as 40 yards before their surge was stopped. Sixteen hundred had started out from the little town below, They took the fight as far as any of mortal flesh could go. As darkness fell upon the field there were wounded men and dying. Some muttered prayers in their foreign tongue, how pitiful their crying. It was a dark December for the army Burnside led. Fourteen assaults in all repulsed with eight Thousand Union dead. With eighty percent casualties Meagher's boys had it worst of all: Fewer than three hundred were left to answer the roll call.

John F. McCullagh
Undress For The T.S.A (Tune Of Come To The Cabaret)

What good is sittin' alone in your room
Hop on a flight today,
First Take off your coat, your hat, your shoes
Undress for the T.S.A..

We’ll scan your suitcase, your ipod and phone
Mister, we have all day,
Undress for the T.S.A. you scum
Undress for the T.S.A..

We grope the guys, we fondle girls
Best of all our acts are legal
Because we’re working for the Eagle

No use permittin' a Prophet’s buffoons
To Wipe every smile away, yes
Undress for the T.S.A. you scum
Undress for the T.S.A!

What good are privacy rights anymore?
With full body scans O.K’d,
Bend over, cough, salute the flag
Undress for the T.S.A.

I once enjoyed holidays by the shore
but now I just drive most days,
rather that than the T.S.A, old Chum
Rather that than the T.S.A.
And as for me,
As for me,

What good is waiting on long airport lines
at the mercy of the T.S.A.
While someone named Kalid pats you down
wands you and kicks your bags around
Makes me loathe the T.S.A.!
Unfinished

Schubert’s hands have grown cold
Their mission unfulfilled
His symphony unfinished
His voice forever stilled.

Some notes were left behind him
A partly finished score
Two terrific movements
Left orphaned ever more.

Those who’ve made the effort
To finish out the piece
Have only met frustration
Channeling the deceased

His symphony was like his life-
The interrupted kind
Both haunted by a melody
Unfinished in the mind

by Robert J. McCullagh

John F. McCullagh
Unity Bridge

A Pall of Civic Sorrow shrouded Charleston like a mist;
Nine bronze coffins in the church nave waiting to be blessed.
Anger would be natural, doesn’t violence beget more?
Is forgiveness even possible? Many were unsure.
The congregation gathered to pray and understand
in the place the murders happened; a church built by freedmen’s hands.

As they prayed about forgiveness, one shrill voice disagreed.
It cursed the “white man’s Jesus” and all those who bend the knee.
Stop praying to your “Massa’s god” and burn the city down;
all those fine homes of brick and wood that stand in Charleston town.

With Faith comes understanding, wisdom denied to the proud.
There will be no wave of violence here, the congregation vowed.
Lord Jesus was not Black or White; his was a brown tanned hide.
He was in chains and felt the lash on the very day he died.

Love is neither slave nor free, as it appears to me.
It is with Love we live and breathe and have true dignity.
So let the White and Black join hands across the Charleston span;
Then we will not be White or Black but each Americans.

John F. McCullagh
Until We Have Faces (2)

I told Ellen that I had to go,
an old friend was in need.
Barbra, my former fiancée,
sounded quite distraught indeed.

Grandma Coleman died that day,
Her Grandpa was fading fast.
He shook from late stage Parkinson's
and clearly would not last.

The funeral home on Fordham Road
was packed with kith and kin.
Indeed, until last summer,
I believed me one of them.

James Coleman Higgins greeted me
without any trace of rancor
He'd thought we got engaged too young.
He'd been right upon that score.

Barbra and her sisters
were seated on one side
James Higgins never had a son,
but as for daughters he had five.

His daughters' skin was sun kissed brown,
their mother hailed from Spain.
(I was glad to see his wife had come,
though they were long estranged.)

I knelt beside the casket there
and offered up a prayer
For this brave old Irish woman
who had suffered much, the dear..

Barbra and I went for a walk outside.
The night was warm and clear.
Upon the face she turned to me
was the dried river bed of tears.
Barbra was despondent with silly talk of suicide.  
Our romance had ended badly, and now Grandma had died.  

I assured her that another, better, love would take the place of mine.  
That she must embrace the future, that sweetness comes with time..  

As humans, we were both incomplete that night on Fordham Road  
Our faces not yet tight in place to help us bear the load.  

Some find their faces early-  
Most, by middle life,  
A tragic few fall into place as their bodies say goodnight.  

I saw her some years afterwards  
Her face was smiling bright.  
Her infant son was in her arms  
I was glad things turned out right.  

I sit here with my Barry's tea  
That Grandma Coleman favored  
and think how splendid the day has been with evening still to be savored.  

John F. McCullagh
Lilliana was quite beautiful
in most peoples'estimation.
Even her name was musical
Her proportions were perfection.
She, being young,
heard her praises sung
by the minstrels of the land.
Of course she was a princess.
His Royal Highness was her Dad.

Little gifts began appearing,
anonymously, of course
Often she heard some angel singing
but could not trace the source.
Her little sisters teased her
about her mystery man.
Who would do anything to please her
Who'd ask Father for her hand.

Could his Father be the Duke
or perhaps the son of an Earl.
Perhaps a Prince of Persia,
from half way across the World
But they were wrong and she was wrong
wrong in the n th degree.
for it was Cupid who loved her so,
the son of Aphrodite.

John F. McCullagh
Until We Meet Again

I will not let my hand let go your hand.  
How little time together here remains:  
Dear sister- looking old, frail, and confused-  
lost somewhere in Morpheus’ gentle dreams.

The taxi that I called is downstairs waiting,  
and shortly I must tear myself away  
Knowing that our parting will be final-  
We will not meet again till Judgment day.

We started out Depression era babies  
When we were young we slept in the same bed  
We had little, except each other, sister  
but I would want for nothing else instead.

We’ve lived full lives and counted up our loses:  
Your husband gone, my youngest in her grave.  
It seems to me that we have come full circle  
Hard times crash against us like a wave.

Our parents long since gone, their time receding.  
Faded photographs behind a frame  
When we are gone who then will remember  
their lives, their love, their faces or their names.  

I take a last long glance to save the memory  
Embrace you in a gentle hug, then part  
and if I can’t abide with you forever  
Live forever young in this old heart.

John F. McCullagh
Unto Us

Borne forth from darkness into light
A child is born this Christmas night
A Mother’s pain is turned to joy
as she swaddles her little boy.

Their habitation is the place
where beasts of burden spend the night.

Their bodies' heat the only warmth
on this cold and bitter night.

This child shall be called many things:
A fraud, a Myth, the King of Kings.

But Mary’s heart, a secret minds
This is the son of the Divine.

This night is born to us a King:
A true judge of the soul’s gain and loss,
whose wisdom will enflame men’s minds.
whose arms embrace us from the cross.
j.m.

John F. McCullagh
Unusually Uncertain

Things are getting better,
Except of course they’re not.
The bailouts have worked miracles
with business gone to pot.
The Nation should experience
Slow growth or slow decline.
We should know soon, unless we don’t-
I can’t make up my mind.

Over in the Eurozone it’s Deutschland uber alles
If Greeks would work like Germans
I’d be sure this market rallies.
If P.I.G.S. escape the barnyard-
We’ll face ruin in our time.
We should know soon, unless we don’t
I can't make up my mind.

Greenspan always soothed my fears,
inchoate though he was.
Bernanke, on the other hand,
Clearly knows not what he does.
Yen and dollar parity will hasten our decline.
Quantitative easing is addictive he will find.
Unusually uncertain is a very scary line!
Irrational Exuberance? I’ll take that any time.

P.I.G.S>: Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain

John F. McCullagh
Valentine's Last Day

The day of execution loomed
And Valentine awaited.
(Just how he'd roused the Emperor's ire
will always be debated.)
His jailer's daughter loved this man,
so saintly and so kind.
Tis said his prayers restored her sight;
she who had been born blind.
Upon the day he was to die
He heard creation sing
The birds were paired up in their nests
To enjoy the life Love brings.
"Please do not weep, my dearest one,
That I have run out of time.
Remember me in your heart and prayers.
With Love, your Valentine."

John F. McCullagh
Victim 0001, A Poem Of 9/11

Father Mychal Judge bent down
to the woman on the floor.
His right hand made the cross in sign
like oft he had before.
Above him the North Tower Burned
like South Tower just next door.

The chaplain of the firemen,
Mychal was a Catholic priest.
Born and bred in Brooklyn,
He was no stranger to these streets.
When he heard word about the planes,
his safety he ignored..
He had to go be with his boys
His trust was in the Lord.

The people in the towers had
the choice to burn or fly.
So many that day took the plunge
preferring not to fry.

The raging fires melted steel.
South Tower started to collapse
The Bravest in her stairwells
never heard recall perhaps.

“Sweet Jesus, Make this end now! ”
Some heard   Father Mychal cry.
Debris from the South Tower
Like a scythe came flying by.

It was blunt force trauma to the head
laid Father Mychal low.
His friends removed his body
before North tower, too, would go.

Thousands passed that terrible day;
the mighty and the small.
When responders came with body bags
Mychal was first of all.

Zero Zero Zero One
A strange number for a Priest,
who rushed where Angels feared to tread,
not fearful in the least

John F. McCullagh
Virgin Sacrifice

The Virgins lay supine
unable to protest.
There would be no escape for them
from what would happen next.
One moment young and ripe and sweet
naked unashamed.
The next pressed into olive oil
and sauteed by a flame

John F. McCullagh
Virtual Vixens

It started out quite harmlessly,
some naughty mixed with nice.
Then it turned into obsession,
an addiction and a vice.

He some became incapable
of talking to a girl
who wasn't made of pixels
screwing in his made up world.

Now virtual vixens fill his nights
and dominate his days.
It all self gratifying
in a sad pathetic way

He's like Don Juan de Marco
losing his humanity
The only connection that he has left
is with Direct T.V.

John F. McCullagh
Voices On The Wind

This is the Anniversary,
of a gentle night in May.
The call came from the nursing home.
to say you'd passed away.

You lay there still and silent
already growing cold.
The Priest already come and gone
to tend to other souls.

We whispered sweet endearments
to our mother good and kind
Released from her infirmities
marked with the Savior's sign.

I wonder did she linger there
to her our sad amens
like she listened to our prayers
said at our childhood beds.

Voices cast upon the wind
beside her final bed.
I'd like to think she heard the tears
and the prayer my sister said.

John F. McCullagh
Wang Makes It Work

Wang works all day at his factory job making I Pods for you and me. The pay is low and his hours are long, but there's job security. The company boss is a suspicious sort of his minions on the job. They must be searched before they leave for fear he might be robbed. There is a safety net at work for Wang and all his crew. It's not medical and dental like exists for me and you. No, this net is a cargo net- to catch leapers, naturally. for preventing suicides is key to profitability.

John F. McCullagh
Warm Summer Rain (Country Western Song)

Living a long lifetime without love,
I had forgotten what confidence was-
But confidence was reclaimed
by her warm summer rain.

Life in the desert can be hard at times.
I had my reasons but none of them rhymed.
but my desert was briefly reclaimed
by her warm summer rain.

When it rains in the desert the wildflowers bloom
And the night air is sweetened with hints of perfume
The desert is utterly changed
by her warm summer rain.

Wildflowers are fleeting, sand always endures.
I'll choose to remember wildflowers' allure.
I'll always remember her name
And her warm summer rain

John F. McCullagh
Watson At The British Open

The aging champion kissed its stones
and waved to all his fans.
At Swilcan bridge across the burn,
As twilight fast descends.

No claret Jug for Tom this day.
His Open at its end
Just this final hole to play
As twilight fast descends.

Five times past champion and beloved
He'll not play here again.
He'll cross this bridge for one last time
As twilight fast descends.

His ball arcs up into the sky
And settles on the green
Near Swilcan bridge across the burn
As twilight fast descends.

A simple putt for birdie, Tom,
Yours was a fitting end
You went out like a champion
As twilight fast descends.

Tom Watson, a five time winner of the British open played his final round at the old course at St. Andrews this year. While former champions are permitted to play the open until age 65, the Open is not scheduled for St. Andrews again until 2015, when Watson would be 67. The Claret jug is the trophy awarded for winning the British Open. In Scottish, a Burn is a small running creek. Tom Watson failed to make the cut this year but he did Birdie his final hole.

John F. McCullagh
Waxing Poetic

I don’t drink any more,
This I freely confess.
Drinking too much
makes ones whole life a mess.

For when I drink too much
I’m a maudlin bore,
and as often as not
I wind up on the floor.

It’s hard to make waves
Or make a big score
When one for the road
means two or three more.

I don’t drink any more
But I think you can guess
My not drinking more
Means I’m not drinking less.

John F. McCullagh
Wedding Dress

I came home from your funeral dressed all in my Sunday best. The shock of losing you is past and now I feel depressed. Our house is large and empty now and silence roams the halls. I remember the happier times before I lost it all.

Some weeks have passed and I've resolved to sell this place and leave. I'll get a small apartment with just space enough to grieve. Of course that means I'll have to pack and cast some things away. That's how I came across the box saved from our wedding day.

How beautiful was the dress your wore on the night that we were wed I still can hear the music played when you pretended that I led. The hand sewn pearls, the lavish lace, your falling auburn curls. How rich a man this pauper was when you were in my world.

John F. McCullagh
Welcome To Babel

Welcome to BABEL

A storm is brewing on the sun and solar flares will soon appear tongues of fire will reach out across millions of miles and sear. Charged particles will crash upon The planet Earth's magnetic fields This may wreak havoc on our world frying our electronic gear.

The sun's been 'quiet' for decades now fewer and fewer sunspots appeared but 'Sol' they say is a variable star and may be vary hot I fear.

When last storms of this magnitude bombarded Terra from afar The vacuum cathode ray was king and analog was still a star.

Our digitized world may not fare well, our games and websites may go down. Then we'll emerge from our cocoons- welcome to Babel with its many sounds

John F. McCullagh
Welcome To Sheol

The smoking wreckage is where once stood
our humble family home.
I am the sole survivor.
Everyone else is gone.

As I wander through the ruins,
I spy a little shoe.
It is the only thing remaining
of my brother who was Two.

My family has been murdered,
byyour mutual hate.
When slaughter is indiscriminate
Peace will come too late.

The holy land? What holy land?
From the river to the sea
This has become the bloody land
And I'm another refugee.

Though genetically indistinguishable;
Semitic one and all.
Ismael will murder Isaac
Or Ismael himself must fall.

John F. McCullagh
Whale Song

The seas of home
Once teemed with life
But now I drift for miles alone.

I sing but there is no reply-
Have the human’s killed us all?
Am I the last beyond recall?

No, I hear the answering call
Echoing out from miles away
A friendly voice above the storm

From without the depths
The answering songs
are fainter now than ere before.

We live amidst man’s detritus
The heavy metals poison all
Thus our proud line falls.

John F. McCullagh
What's Donne Is Donne

As militant Mullahs mutter and pray
And plan their Mosque near ground Zero
Protesters march and people say:
"This isn't right! They'll have to go."

But let's demur and make no noise
No tears, no threats, no signs approve.
It would profane our civic faith
To tell the Mullah he must move.

The Towers’ fall brought harm and fear
Men reckon what that did and meant;
But building a “cultural Center” near
Though demonized, is innocent.

Dull couch potatoes of the Right
Those ditto heads who can't admit
Tolerance, cause it doth reprove
Those thoughts that have them in a snit.
But we, my love, are so refined
that we ourselves don’t care one whit.
Let them build it, come what may
But build a brothel next to it.

Two buildings place there, cheek to cheek:
the Mosque and "Annie’s House of Pain".
One dealing with things spiritual,
The other deals with things profane.

In both, salvation is for sale
It seems to me a perfect fit.
For do not both invoke God’s name?
-and both, I fear, use whips a bit.

students at the Madrasah may
hear the cries of Joy next door
on her mattress, hard at play
While they use prayer mats on the floor.

Will they too prove as tolerant?
Live and let live, for now- they say
When they enforce Sharia law,
The folks next door will learn to pray.

John F. McCullagh
Wheeler Field 12-7-41

In fear of saboteurs, we parked planes wing to wing
which made them easy targets from the air.
While relations were uneasy with Imperial Japan
up to this point war had not been declared.
Peace ended when we heard the drone of their incoming planes
and saw a row of Hawks go up in flames.
Wheeler field was target rich and their pilots were well trained,
They bombed and strafed, destroying all they found.

In the lull between the waves of the onslaught of their planes,
We got a dozen war hawks off the ground.
We twelve angry would be heroes
had little chance against their Zeros
but we struck a blow and shot some bombers down.

Ford Island was half hidden by the smoke and flames that rose
from the stricken battle-wagons on the row.
It was dangerous to remain flying any sort of plane
as the sailors there would shoot at friend or foe.

The attacking fleet made sail and returned back to Japan.
They had hurt us but they left their job half done.
Our fuel farms were still here and facilities for repair;
We'd raise our ships to fight the rising Sun.

John F. McCullagh
When Sleeping Beauty Died

When Sleeping Beauty Died
Her parents weren't there to cry
The day that sleeping beauty died.
First Dad, then Mother, slipped away
as their comatose daughter slept each day.
Through forty two years of dreamless sleep
Her loving family did their promise keep.
A drug reaction was the cause
of her coma irreversible.
By the power of
Unconditional love
The faint flickering flame
Of life stayed possible.
Until today did beauty lie.
Until today did life endure.
Today she smiled and opened her eyes
Only then did beauty die..

John F. McCullagh
When We Dead Awaken

My trusted family doctor said
Sit down, I have bad news.
Your PSA is very high
Here are tests we have to do.”

That numbly as if in shock.
Scarcely heard a word.
This can’t be happening to me
This whole thing is absurd.

Have a wife, three kids I love
Important work to do
A house in a good suburb,
With a mortgage payment due.

* * *
Went into the hospital
And they performed the test.
Can’t say now which was worse-
The pain or my distress.

Started bleeding heavily
The room swam from my view
They told me later that I spent
Three days in I.C.U.

Three days I spent dead to this world
Like Jesus in the tomb
But no angel awakened me-
Just the beeping breathing tube.

**
The biopsy was negative
No cancer cells were found
They gave me back this life again,
But turned my world around.
I walked alone along the beach
Where sea contends with land
I thought about my life restored
My life’s work seemed like sand.

I noticed as I walked along
The verge of sand and sea
The busy tide washed out my steps—all evidence of me.

The gods I’ve worshipped all my life
Are mortal just like me.
But the God stuff is eternal
Like the salt and unplumbed sea.

John F. McCullagh
When We Put Meg Down

It isn’t fair, it isn’t right; I don’t care what they say.
My dog was more than a pet to me; I lost a friend today.
Though I did the kindest thing, and stayed with her to the last.
I come back to a quieter house, now that my friend has passed.
The unused leash, the ownerless bowl, I survey through my tears.
Meg was my boon companion. Far too few were her years.

The vet gave me a cherished poem that I’ll read tonight again.
It promised Meg will wait for me just beyond the rainbow’s end.
The souls of Dogs are gentle which is why it takes less time
Before they achieve perfection and are ready for the climb
To that place across the rainbow, to the place where journeys end
Where the roses bloom forever I will always have my friend.

John F. McCullagh
Whiskey Business

Elizabeth, the virgin Queen, left vacant the English throne.  
Her Scottish Stuart cousin came and claimed it for his own.  
Two nations with one monarchy joined in the Union Jack.  
The Scottish lost their nationhood and now they want it back.  
Saint Andrews' Flag of Bonnie Blue will have to be unfurled  
if Scotland votes to take its place among nations in the world.  
Quebecois and Basques today are eagerly looking on  
to see if Scots will vote to tell the English to be gone.  
Hadrian's Wall will, once more, mark where their dominion ends.  
Remove your subs from Scapa Flow; your lease is at an end.  
There still remains a problem which, just now, occurs to me.  
If the English take their Pound with them, what is our currency?  
It's true we're rich with North Sea oil and better off than Spain.  
Yet how do we do business if the Sterling won't remain.  
We need a new &quot;Gold&quot; standard based upon the single malt!  
Who needs pounds when we have ounces stored in barrels and in vaults?  
So pour me a &quot;MacCallan&quot; on the day the rent comes due.  
Hand me a glenfiddich and I'll purvey food to you..  
Our creditors will be well pleased with hints of bog and peat.  
We won't dilute our currency as Scots men drink it neat.

John F. McCullagh
Who Will Watch The Watchers?

They monitor the internet.
They listen in on calls.
They spy on foreign Heads of State-
Believe me that takes balls
Their surveillance apparatus
Makes the KGB look LAX.
Omniscience is their stated aim
to "protect" us from attacks.
So put up with whole body scans
And show your papers please.
I believe the cure for terror
Will prove worse than the disease.

John F. McCullagh
Whose Child Is This?

An Aussie Couple in their middle years
had despaired of children of their own.
To fill that empty room at home
They would need a womb on loan.

A Young Thai woman without a mate
agreed to be their surrogate.
To spare them from a childless fate
Ten Thousand was the going rate.

Fraternal twins, a boy and girl,
were implanted in the Surrogate.
The little girl, a perfect child.
Her brother faced a darker fate.

A child with Down's is often slain
before they see the light of day.
Identified prenatally,
They are aborted right away.

The surrogate, in awe of God,
would not accede to such a fate.
The 'Parents' refused the 'damaged goods'
and were 'understandably' irate.

His 'parents' wouldn't take him home
Due to his mismatched chromosomes.
His surrogate who gave him birth
became his only friend on Earth.

One child accepted, one denied;
They say 'He is no child of mine!'
The surrogate will raise him as her own;
Though he be less than kin she's more than kind.

John F. McCullagh
Why?

As darkness falls the shelling stopped and the Earth grew ever colder.
It's taking far too long to die for one badly wounded soldier.
Abandoned by his comrades for the safety of their trench,
He's dying out in no man's land amidst the gore and stench,
too late for prayer, too late for Love Too late even for repentance.
He hears the cries for "Mother" from those under the same sentence.
With labored breath he, too, gives voice to the dark forbidding sky.
The last word from his dying lips is the simple question: "Why?"

John F. McCullagh
Wicked Witch From The West

(parody to tune of the Beatles “Lady Madonna”)  

Nancy Pelosi, looking none too sweet
If we paid for your face lift, hope you kept the receipts.
Who pays out the money for your private jet?
Don’t think that is helping the environment.

Your face pulled tighter than a tambourine skin
Your botox treatment botched and overdone
You’ve got a face that terrifies small children

See how they run! !

Nancy Pelosi, the taxpayers oppressed
as you donate their savings to the “poor distressed”.

Nancy Pelosi, lying to the press
seems there’s a “for rent” sign hanging round your breasts
Your sense of self importance is unending
Too bad impeachment papers never come
your reign of error shortly will be ending.
Run, blue dogs, run!

Nancy Pelosi, the taxpayers oppressed
as you donate their savings to the “poor distressed”.

John F. McCullagh
Winter Is Upon Us

Winter is upon us
The crowds all melt away
The Yanks clear out their lockers
for an unwelcome holiday.

This winter will be longer
than the winter just before
Some teammates will be leaving
Maybe breaking up the core.

I'm certain Jeter will return
to chase three thousand hits.
Jorge's under contract
so I'm sure that he won't sit.

Andy Pettite still can pitch
but there's doubt that he'll return
and Rivera's just turned Forty-
does the will to win still burn?

He alone unbeaten
by the Texas Rangers core
Though Moreland got a hit or two
he didn't yield a score.

Has Sandman played for the last time
If so, It's no disgrace.
Before him lies the Hall of Fame
but who will take Mo’s place? ? ? ? ?

John F. McCullagh
Wise Child

When they called the role next morning
His was among the missing names.
So many of the Bravest
had perished in the flames.

That firefighters’ widow
Had special reason to be sad:
The baby she was carrying
might never know his Dad.

New Yorkers mourned the fallen,
even as they fought the flames.
The embers of September
would not cool for many days.

In May of the year following
She took her little one
to his Father's graveside
to show his namesake son.

She wept for love remembered
And vowed to do her part
to see this child, who bore his name,
.would know her hero's heart

True, there would be no pictures
On the refrigerator door
Of Dad and son together
wrestling on the floor.

No photo at the little league-
He would miss his boy’s home run.
No Father -son catch in the yard
when the long work day’s done.
The boy would learn about his Dad  
From her two older sons-  
From photos in an album-  
From Dad’s fire fighter chums.

There were stories she could tell him,  
and some that she could not.  
The tears that come at midnight  
He could better do without.

Primarily he would meet him  
in the rituals of the tribe.  
There’s communion in the Pasta  
There’s a silent sense of pride.

To never know a Father’s kiss  
Or feel his warm embrace.  
To carry on his father’s name  
Yet not meet face to face.

That is the wise child’s burden-  
To do the best he can.  
Assemble the Mosaic  
And finally know the man.

(Story of a 9/11 fire fighter who died in the towers, and his son who was born posthumously.)

John F. McCullagh
With Every Step We Take

Twenty miles, then twenty miles,
then twenty miles again.
We’ll keep on walking, day by day,
towards breast cancer’s end.

With every step, with every stair,
We train to walk this path
To raise the funds to fight the beast
And consign it to the past..

It will be hot, It may be wet
As we traverse the miles
and when we rest, beneath the stars,
We’ll sleep like stones awhile

With every step, with every mile
We’re walking towards a cure
And we would walk a thousand miles
To end its’ reign for sure..

If not in time for one we loved
Perhaps in time for others-
So many suffer scars or worse
where death’s dark angel hovers.

Twenty miles, then twenty miles,
then twenty miles again.
We’ll keep on walking, day by day,
towards breast cancer’s end.

John F. McCullagh
With Or Without Her

For twenty years
they loved and bickered
She was smarter,
he was quicker.
They then divorced
In acrimony
He got freedom
She got alimony.
For ten years then
They lived apart.
But hunger grew
within each heart.
So they remarried
Made a new start
And this time only
Death did part.
What did he tell friends?
What was his take?
“We got divorced
But it was a mistake.”

John F. McCullagh
Woman From The Well

On Spring Street in SOHO I worked in a bar
The Manhattan Bistro, since closed down, I hear.
In its basement what remains of a well can be seen;
the scene of a murder that still haunts my dreams.

The Winter solstice was, once again, drawing near,
its night, cold and dreary, the longest of the year.
What brought me downstairs, I cannot now tell.
It was there that I saw her, the woman from the well.

Her long tresses hung down; limp, lifeless and dead,
and an old fashioned hair comb she wore on her head.
Her muslin dress was archaic, with bustle and lace.
She seemed lonely and listless, a sad look on her face.

In life she'd been lovely, a pert Twenty two.
Yes, Elma Sands, I'd heard all about you.
As I stood in stunned silence, another appeared.
A malevolent Specter of a man passed me near.

He throttled the girl till, unconscious, she fell.
He tossed her, still living, down the depths of the well.
Then like vapors they vanished- to Heaven or Hell?
Someone called from the Bar and it shattered the spell.

Few heard her pleas on the night that she died.
When she first was discovered it was thought suicide.
Rumors spread quickly back in Old Dutch New York.
Surely that girl was murdered, such was the talk.

No doubt killed by a Lover who wanted no Bride.
Levi Weeks was arrested. The charge- Homicide.
Rumors were spread that he'd promised they'd wed,
That they planned to elope- but he'd killed her instead.

The Lawyers he hired were both men of renown;
Hamilton and Burr were both heroes in town.
The mob wanted blood; they screamed Levi's name.
The jury declined to convict, just the same.
The facts of the murder may never be known.
What man followed Elma, and found her alone,
In a meadow deserted on the outskirts of town?
What man took her life, which was not his to take,
when she bravely refused to consent to her rape?

In the heart of our city, her ghost finds no peace;
Two centuries later and still no release.
Venture down to the cellar on Spring Street if you dare;
On the Solstice her ghost will appear to you there

John F. McCullagh
Woodstock Generation/Memorial Day

For every aging boomer
there are one or two they've known:
Heroes of the battlefield
Who never made it home.

Some classmate who was butchered
in a fire fight in "Nam.
A sibling who had perished
in the standoff at Khe Sanh.

Perhaps the Tet offensive
left some friend's blood spilled and spent.
Politicians speak of glory-
It's the grunts who pay the rent

From the walls of Hue to Can Ranh Bay
from Tonkin to Saigon.
there is a wall in Washington
with their names inscribed thereon.

The lucky ones who did come home
recall the name and face
of some heroic eighteen year old
who perished in their place.

(dedicated to Corporal Frank Evangelista, Jr. and 58000 others who never made it to woodstock)

John F. McCullagh
Wordplay

A word was born, some years ago,
Perhaps from Mister Marlowe’s pen.
Will Shakespeare stole it for his play.
The groundlings picked it up that way.
It gained currency by the hour-
For such is a poets’ power,
though Marlowe died in a tavern brawl
And all but scholars forget his name,
Words conquer worlds, thoughts persist
far longer than his Tamburlaine.
Genetic lines may hit dead ends
From war or pestilence or fate-
But words poetic or prosaic
Survive (though sometimes they’re Archaic.)

John F. McCullagh
Words Of Comfort

“Till death do us part.”
Is a comforting phrase
To all those who repent
their impetuous days.
Those whose “I do’s” were followed
By a question mark,
Or who subsequently experienced
a quick change of heart.
It’s a comfort to them,
on their terminal day,
that their sentence is over
and they can get away.
When the last breath is expelled
Then their marriage is through.
They are free then to love
Anybody but you

John F. McCullagh
Wrong Island

I love the Macadamia nut
dipped in dark chocolate for me.
I enjoy a good cup of Kona
from those islands across the sea.

I delight in the scent of the flowers
(I do so enjoy getting Lei’d)
The sweet succulent taste of pineapple
could serve as my breakfast each day.

Roast pig is a treat at a luau.
Mahi Mahi, fresh caught from the sea
I do think I’m on the wrong Island-
stuck in traffic on the L.I.E.

John F. McCullagh
Wrong Side Of Town

Consider the plight
of the poor young black male
with only a mother at home.
He has no role model,
No Father to love,
Poverty darkens his home.
The school teachers care
for their pension and pay,
they let these kids slip through the cracks.
"If their parents don't care,
Then why should I care?"
Their attitude, I think, sadly lacks.
When you don't have a job and you
Wander the streets
And the "dealers" won't leave you alone
Is it any surprise when a young black male dies
or makes jail his permanent home?
We have more kids in jail than the rest of the world.
More die here than died in Iraq.
Wall Street is flying and young blacks are dying.
They're not doing as well as Barrack.

John F. McCullagh
Yellow Brick Road

When Dorothy trod the paths of Oz
Her companions were deficient:
One lacked Courage,
One lacked brains,
One was heartless, but
Ax Proficient.

She was an illegal alien,
from Kansas, of all places!
Imagine, when she and
Toto came-
the look on people’s faces.

Still that was seventy years ago.,
In another place and time-
Just before we went to war
against evil personified.

If Dorothy, today, appeared
with a similar convocation
The Wizard might mistake them
for a Congressional Delegation

For lack of brain and heart and spine
Our Congress is more than sufficient-
Some lack Courage, some lack brains
Some are heartless but
tax proficient

John F. McCullagh
Yes We Can

The people massed at Lincoln Park
upon election Eve.
It was a night not to forget
Dice cast with no reprieve.
Torches shed an eerie light
upon the platform there.
The People’s hero climbed the steps
the answer to their prayer.
Like Reagan in a different age-
That dark horse of the Right-
The President-Elect spoke to his base-
He played Left field all night.
His campaign based on “Hope” and “Change”
Had left the Right confused
Armed with twin majorities,
It was bound to be bad news.
A high school Student council race
Could hinge on Hope and fears
Barrack’s had borrowed his campaign
From Cliff, the guy on “Cheers”
Somewhere above, George Soros sat,
Jove on Olympus High.
His money all had been well spent
And he controlled this guy.
Like something out of Nuremberg
That nighttime rally seemed-
And the Right, like German Jews,
sadly surveyed the scene.

Cliff, the drunken mailman on the Sit-Com “Cheers” ran a race for City Council
in one episode on a meaningless Platform of “Change” It worked better for Obama.

John F. McCullagh
You Again!

I open up my door
and I see you again.
I told you just last week
not to come back again.
Although you were a childhood friend,
You're just a stalker in the end
You'll wind up on the streets again

I have my snow plough ready.

John F. McCullagh
You Look Like Her

You look like her.

No, not in the full light, 
nor to the searching 
and discerning eye. 
But glimpsed briefly- 
En passant- 
By a mind preoccupied 
Like a ghostly image 
You look like her..

You, of course, are you. 
The resemblance is 
Superficial 
It is like touching 
A woman on her shoulder 
Thinking, wrongly, 
That she was one 
I had loved.

John F. McCullagh
You Never Walk Alone

I will walk with you tomorrow
through the streets of Boston town.
I will be right there beside you,
if you but take a look around.

I will help you bear the suffering
As you walk the sixty miles.
I will be right there beside you
In such breeze as can be found.

I will walk with you tomorrow
as your spirit proves its worth.
I will be right there beside you
though I no longer walk on earth.

It was six years ago this day
I suffered and I died.
So now my God-child walks for me
And I will share your miles.

You are walking with survivors
of the chemo and the knife.
Hear me in their laughter.
See me in their life.

I will walk with you tomorrow
Through the streets of Boston town
I will be right there beside you,
if you just take a look around.

John F. McCullagh
Zeus And Company

Duck Dynasty has been replaced
by the folks at "A" & "E".
we're "GLAAD" to hear they lost their spot
to Zeus and company.
It's felt the morals of Zeus 'clan
Reflect the zeitgeist better.
Zeus is fond of little boys,
Swans, and shapely heifers.
Hera, his wife, of all her kids,
loves Artemis the most.
Apollo and Athena
Leave no room for the "Holy ghost"
Dionysus will do well
while hawking wine and beer.
Though Polyphemus freaks me out
Fans say he is a dear.
So tune in for the Sausage fest
And watch the hunt for beaver.
The role of Ganymede has been cast-
He's played by Justin Bieber.

John F. McCullagh