

Poetry Series

**John F. McCullagh**  
**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**  
2017

**Publisher:**  
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

# John F. McCullagh(09/28/1954)

My influences are Browning, Service, Donne, Thomas Grey, E.A. Poe and Shakespeare.

# Sacred Flame (A Tale Of The Neanderthals) L

□

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

# "84th Floor West Office 12 People Trapped";

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.  
Charlie, the Tuna with good taste, had been brought to ground.  
"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

&quot;That'll be the day&quot; 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

## 5-5-5-5

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

&lt;/&gt;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 Sergeant'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

## A Light Before Dying (Dark Humor)

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-  
compensated 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.  
Must 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-  
In 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 Pale Horse, George A. Custer And The Seventh Calvary

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 Damage!

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\$ire

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 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,  
ere 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 "cooperating witness" 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

# Adam's Rib

□

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  
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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

# Addicted To Distraction

The soft blue glow of his smartphone screen  
Attracts him like a lover.  
He looks intently at the &quot;feed&quot;;  
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

## 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.

Montresor'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 Montessor'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: 'pujar!  
El bebé viene  
Lo puedo ver, la corona '

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

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

# Annonymity

A most peculiar thing is

Annonymity

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 Tryannis: " 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 thats 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

# Artist Unknown

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.  
They 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 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.'

'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

# Autobiography Of A Snowflake

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

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".

□  
□  
□



John F. McCullagh

## 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! "  
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.

&lt;/&gt;&lt;/&gt;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.  
Estee 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 &quot;yes&quot; He was happy he had dared to take the chance.  
Their first date was at &quot;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.  
&quot;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

# Burning Bush

□

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,  
Evermore 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

□

John F. McCullagh

# 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 Amarillascamino 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

&lt;/&gt;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

# Charnel High

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

# Cindy Perl, Thanks For Nothing

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 welcomingly  
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

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

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

Its 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 fiancée,  
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 transgenderes  
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



## Culp's Hill

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 AI 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

# Dementia

□

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



# Diamond Heart

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 "Broken Heart";  
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,  
&quot;Mr. Cub&quot; 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,  
Her smooth child's cheek  
now wrinkled  
by the light of many days.

Such days as those  
she never saw.  
Informed upon  
and damned.  
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 hurting  
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 "relief" 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

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.

Its 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 pleased 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

# Dust Bowl

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

</>English pub by hienbau\_photos

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

# Earthlight (Sexual Situations, Microgravity)

□

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-  
her 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 on 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

svcks 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 Spurrina 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,  
But 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

# Evergreen

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,  
lies 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 illumed 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,  
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?

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 damned.  
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

# Fahrenheit 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 delete 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 Piel's.

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

# Fight

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 quoit-  
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

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



# Force Of Nature

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

# Full Faith And Credit

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

&lt;/&gt;

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.'  
Its 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  
Long 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

# Gettysburgh 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 that 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

# Happy Mother's Day

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

# Heaven On Earth

□

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 Bolshevik 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

# Helen Thomas

□

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



# Hell No!

A weak and vacillating man,  
one vain and narcissistic,  
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."

John F. McCullagh

# 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 Lillith 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

## Himmelstrasse 10/14/43

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

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 that 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

# Home Coming

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;  
enough 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.

John F. McCullagh

# 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

## I.C.E.S.

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'LI See You Later

'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

# Immortal Me

□

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

&lt;/&gt;&lt;/&gt;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 Bulbin  
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



## In The Heart Of The South 08/25/1955

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

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 onrushing 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?  
Peres 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 crueller 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:  
&quot;Welcome to Trans World Airlines Flight 800 to Rome via Paris&quot;

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

John F. McCullagh

# 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 sanguinity  
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.  
&quot;The butterflies are free! &quot; they mocked; &quot;Those girls reaped  
what they sowed.&quot;  
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

# 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

# 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.

John F. McCullagh

## 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 drinking 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- cotton mouthed, 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

# Little Black Dress

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

# Living In Dog Years

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

# Living In The Ruins

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

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 whores 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":

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

□  
□

Must so many seasons in a lifetime.  
Must 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

# Make Me Proud

□

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



# 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  
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

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John F. McCullagh

## Mediums, Well Done

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, T'would 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



# Mh17

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

# Michael Furey

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 Bulbin 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

## Modern 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

□

Ttogether, alone  
Eever apart.  
Dichotomies reign  
I modern hearts.

Messages sent  
By E-mail or phone  
Ttogether, apart  
Eever alone.

One takes flight  
The other stays home.  
Eever apart  
Ttogether alone.

□

On a long winter's evening  
Each will practice their art.  
Ttogether, alone  
Eever 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

John F. McCullagh



# Moolah

□

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  
Bu 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

# Mortal Glory

They were outnumbered and outgunned off the Island of Samar.  
It was October twenty fifth, in nineteen forty four.  
Mac Arthur'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.  
&quot;Fire&quot; 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 &quot;Abandon ship&quot; 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  
opportunely 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  
musr 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 change 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 gland 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,  
To 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.  
&quot;Good job, little guy! &quot;

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

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 device.  
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 ass\*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,  
In 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  
To 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

# One Was Taken, The Other Left

.  
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,  
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



# 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 was deep.  
&quot;Yes&quot; she said, &quot;this is my son.&quot;  
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 statues 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:  
&quot;We salute thee, Mighty Lord, we who are about to die.&quot;

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 &quot;dew&quot; 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,  
never 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

## Poe-M

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

# Pornocchio

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

&lt;/&gt;World War 1 Soldier Taillem Bend by Illawarrarian

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 mammaries,  
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.  
Too 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,  
never 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 e 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 &quot;Ode to Flatulence&quot; 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,  
ran 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

## Repertoire

There are songs that I no longer play,  
even when I'm at practice alone.  
The words are too 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 Einsatzgruppen 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

## Room 3312

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

# Same Sentence

□

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

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

# Screampplay

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

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

# Shonin

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

# Sniper

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.

John F. McCullagh



# 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

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



# Sophia

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

# Speakeasy

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 Bank 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.  
Cloves 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

# Stardust

□

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

# State Of Grace

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

# Staying The Course

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 fussed 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.

John F. McCullagh

# Stoppage Time

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

# Story Of A Life

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

# Straw

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

# Sudden Death

## Sudden Death

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.  
Glowing 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 prowling,  
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.  
His 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 damned.  
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 Babe Bows Out      06-13-1948

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 outstriped  
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

# The Beginning Of Wisdom

&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 Vintners 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 cheek  
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:  
"Forgive them, 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 breach 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 Procula'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

Procula: Wife of Pontius Pilate. In the gospel of Matthew she had a dream concerning Jesus and asked he 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

# The Cutting Room Floor

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

□

□

John F. McCullagh

# 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

# The Day That Darren Wilson Died (Alternate History)

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 Declaration Of Inspiration

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

# The Door To Yesterday

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

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. Mc Cullagh

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

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 roombut 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 newfriendBill W. will lead me to salvation.

John F. McCullagh

# The Empty Nest

The wind is raw, a sleeting 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

# The Enemy Of The People

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



# The Firestorm,03/09/45

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&quot; 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 &quot;Troubles&quot;  
the &quot;Blanket boys&quot; 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 dammed.

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  
ere 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 "casus belli" 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 "password" when fighting the  
hacker next door.

Our motorized shades were ascending as the missus was trying to dress.  
"Alexa" just called her a "fat Cow"- 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\$\$

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.

Ive 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 Informer

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 Last Council- May 1,1863

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,  
never 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

# The Legion Of The Lost

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

# The Life Sequential

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 Iliad- In 50 Words Or Less

Paris stole Agamemmon'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 beaux 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

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

# The Mayaguez Incident

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 somebodys 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

□

□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 damned 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 a 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

□

An injury in sophomore year  
Caused me to miss the springtime meets.  
I was sitting in a cast  
While my teammates won their heats.

I 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.

I doff my sweats and start to stretch  
I take no chances with this knee.  
Soon 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'll pass him like he's standing still  
Then he'll be chasing me instead.

I pass the jogger right away  
The pale runner, though, moves speedily  
I pick up my pace a notch  
Just as quickly so does he..



↳ stretch my stride, he does the same  
↳ and gains upon me steadily  
↳ thought that I was chasing him  
↳ 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.  
↳ dig down for a last reserve  
↳ didn't think I'd lost a step  
↳ bad news, if it's true, for me

↳ hear his foot falls close behind  
↳ and vainly try to stay ahead  
↳ turn my head to see his face  
↳ 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"  
↳ 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  
↳ 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.  
&quot;There's no use for you to struggle.&quot; An announcer's voice then said.

&quot;You've hurt our sales with your campaigns&quot; the pleasant voice went on.

&quot;our sales are down across the board, our latest soda bombed.&quot;

&quot;While our truckers want to rub you out, We insist you won't be harmed.&quot;

&quot;We are trying to convert you, though our tactics are strong armed.&quot;

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

□

□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.

□hear the baying of his hounds  
□my absence has been noted there  
□men with torches, men with guns,  
□my soul freezes me with fear.

□am the fox, his are the hounds  
□hat I must run a desperate race  
□to fail is to be chained and whipped  
□hen sold – a horrid fate I face

□he dogs grow close, but the river's near  
□leap and overcome my fear.  
□he water will disguise my scent  
□With swift strong stokes I'll soon be clear

□With joy I hear the hounds, confused,  
□arking, helpless, and at bay.  
□But master gets me in his sights  
□And sets me free another way.

□awaken from sleep with a start.  
□One nightmare stops, the next begins  
□shower, shave and dress for work  
□and wonder if it ever ends..

□

□

John F. McCullagh

# 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

&lt;/&gt;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 differnt 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 incised 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.

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\*• a poetic term for a shore (as the area periodically covered and uncovered by the tides)

John F. McCullagh

# The Stranger

□

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.  
&quot;Which of these gifts will they select? &quot; 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  
That's 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 pilfery.  
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 theyll 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 tribesmen, 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 &quot;normal&quot; by policemen on the force.  
They apprehended me in public having an\*I 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 &quot;abnormal&quot;, 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



# The Witness On Trial

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

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.  
"Are you a Christian?" The perturbed man inquired.  
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

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 breach 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

# Three Minutes To Midnight

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.

&quot;Taking the air out of the ball&quot;  
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 the Phillies' 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

# Umbrella

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

# Un Homme Vrai

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.!



John F. McCullagh

# 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

## Until We Have Faces (Part One)

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,  
annonymously, 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.  
&quot;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.&quot;

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 you 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,  
by your 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;  
Semites 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

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  
There are tests we have to do.”

Sat 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 anew "Gold" standard based upon the single malt!  
Who needs pounds when we have ounces stored in barrels and in vaults?  
So pour me a "MacCallan" 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 pre natally,  
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 a 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