

WRITING BY CLENECE HILLS

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Making the Harvest: April through September

When my husband was a little boy,
He made the harvest every season.
Tagging his dad,
Tugging his brother.

They had a crew
And they followed the ripening fields
From Fort Worth to Williston.
(Wheat ripens northward eleven feet per minute.)

Winters in Williston were dark, cold,
And at the end, meager.
But the winter wheat was waiting beneath the earth
And before school was out, they were out
And off to Texas
To start all over again.

No matter that schools had other seasons,
Those who made the harvest
Couldn't make school on time,
Or stay for the Memorial Day Picnic.

No wonder that my husband is nostalgic
About combine parts,
Short order cooks,
And assignments not completed.

Body Language

Once my champion,
I dared to disagree
With him.

And as I learned more,
I disagreed more often
With him.

He has an agenda,

Inconsistent with the best interests
Of the project.

He influences a
Little One
Who has BIG
Responsibilities.

She cuddles against his
Big Side.
He puffs up and looks
Manly.

That the Little One
Is his project
Is very clear.

Whenever I redirect
The dialogue,
He rolls his eyes,
Leans forward,
And shakes his head.

I get it.

Experience

At a school dance
I saw some kids
Exploring each other
With silly pats and pushes
Squeals and shouts and swishes.

I thought
How nice to be
Past All That.
How nice to be
Subtle
And
Sophisticated
Simultaneously.

The game's the same.
We're just better players now.
And, of course,
The stakes are higher.

I Know About Angels

I know about Angels.
I believe in Angels.
They protect and guide us.
I hope that everyone has an angel.

Angels are everywhere and nowhere
All at the same time.
In the summer they wear gossamer wings
And in the winter, they wear white fuzzy robes.
Angels don't have alarm clocks,
Because they never sleep.

I think some angels are in the faces of dogs.
Dogs are totally forgiving; they don't hold grudges.
They always have an expectant, optimistic look.

Some angels live in sycamore trees,
Blending in to that beautiful bleached bark.
Angels like gold and silver and even copper,
But they disapprove of television and fast cars.

Angels know a lot about the sky.
Infinity is the realm of angels.
Spirits move through time and space
Into a fourth dimension.
The elements of earth, wind, water and fire
Are their tools.
I know about Angels and I believe in Angels.

Looking for Lucinda

On a trip to Texas last week
I looked for my great grandmother.
She was asleep beside her husband
In the cemetery on the eastside.

The stone said her name was Lucinda Moore.
But there's more to her than Moore.
The stone did not say that she once had
Another name.

That other name I'm searching for -
It will be found somewhere along the road from Asheville
To Arkansas,
A road where tears made muddy passage.

When I look into her dark brown eyes
Looking into my grandmother's dark brown eyes
I'm using my dark brown eyes
And I see myself.

Sometimes I think my sense of certainty
Has its roots in the marriage of mind and earth.
I want to believe that this serenity
Came from Lucinda and her looking glass eyes.

One day I'll find a paper or a stone
That tells me more about Lucinda
That tells me more about her Indian name
That tells me more about me.

Louise

She was born the Day
Of the Land Rush.

She had brown eyes
And little lips.

She thought that
I walked on water.

Having a granddaughter
Was the best thing
She ever knew.

She pressured my granddad
To give in and give up
Everything for me.

She was my loyal friend,
My Indian, suspicious,
Advice-giving, clothes-loving
Grandmother.

Happy birthday, Louise Lipps Roberts.
Today you would be 118.
I wish you were here.
I still need you.

Mason Jars

I had a poetry teacher once

Who said to ask each kid
To bring a Mason jar
To school,
Filled with interesting things
To write about.

The teacher in me said
Glass on the bus?
No way.
The Mason jar could break
And sharp edges
Could become weapons
Or accidents.

Poetry can be dangerous,
You know!

Put that stuff in a brown paper bag.
You can still inspect the stuff,
Be inspired by the stuff,
The stuff that dreams are made of.

Written during a Sandy Lyne workshop, 1996, Revised April 22, 2007

Morning Glories

What a lot of effort it seems
Winding and vining
Always looking for a place to attach
And a place to extend.

What a lot of effort it Seems
To turn to face the sun every morning.
To close up shop at dusk
Only to do it all over again.

How extravagant it seems
To see blossoms spent
And dropping to the earth.
Short, intense points of color and light.
Not once questioning whether it is worth it.

No color compares to the blue of Morning Glories
No face shows more hope.
No worker is more tireless.
No artist is more precise.
Morning Glories get it right over and over again.

There's a lesson
In their relentless pursuit of the sun,
Believing every morning it will be there.
Morning Glories are
An act of faith.

Numbers Instead of Names

I know why
I don't like
Titles.

Titles bring closure,
Making it harder
To add,
Subtract,
Or multiply.

I don't like
Titles
For the same reason
That I like
Questions
More than
Answers.

On a Train to Oregon

My grandfather finished medical school
And he got on a train to go to Oregon
To be a doctor and to make his way.

A friend said, "There's a little town in Kansas
Needs a doctor. Oughta look it over."
So when the Santa Fe went through Walton
He got off and looked around.

That first day he set a broken arm,
Delivered a baby, and stitched a machinery cut.
And he never did get back on the train
For Oregon.

He was a horse and buggy doctor
Until he bought a Buick.
He practiced in Walton for over fifty years.

The babies he delivered

Stayed there
And later, had babies he delivered
Who stayed there
And later,
Had babies he delivered.

Eventually those babies
Moved away.
And now, no doctor in a Buick
Delivers babies
In Walton, Kansas.

Point of Reference

I wonder

If using proper nouns
In Poetry
Limits one's interest.

For example,
If you don't know
Sandy Lyne
Or Nicole Smith
Or George Bush
Do you care about poems
That use their names?

It scares me sometimes
That allusions are almost
Illusions.

It scares me sometimes
That fewer and fewer people
Take the world in
And save it
So that they can resurrect it
And make connections.

Written during a Sandy Lyne workshop, February 5, 1996, Revised April 22, 2007.

Salesmanship

He said to me:

Use my words
To tell your story.
After all, one word

Is as good as
Another.
Use my words.
Do not add, subtract -
Or you surely will not
Multiply.
Use my words.
They tell your story
Better
Than you can.
Use my words.
Take them from ear to brain
Paper to mind
And SPIT THEM OUT.

But no.
NO.
I cannot use your words.
Your words come
From the Outside In.
And my words,
My words come
From the Inside Out.
Your words are like
Offering me
Your old bubble gum,
Worn out,
And filled with
Your Hot Air.
NO.
I cannot chew your words.

Self-Esteem

I saw a flower in a junkyard.

It was standing straight up
Between the milk carton
And the Chevy hubcap.

The leaves had holes
And they were brown
Around the edges.
But the stem was straight up.

The blossom was red
And tilted
Toward the sun,

Oblivious of the milk carton
And the Chevy hubcap.

It was a hardy flower,
Probably a zinnia.
It could take the heat just fine,
And it bloomed
Long past its season.

Victory

He scorned me:
You have lost.
Your idea
Has been defeated.

I smiled
Because I knew
That his idea
Was my idea,
Completed.

Watermelon on Main Street McKinney, Texas, 1981

We were behind a wagonload
Of watermelon
On Main Street.
The driver hit a speed bump
Too fast
And speedily
Great green watermelon
Spilled on to
Main Street.
Pink juice splashed
Everywhere.

People walking by
Stopped walking
And ran into the river
Of pink juice.

They scooped jagged halves
Into themselves
Slurping
Slushing

Sluicing
The Juice.

This is the Seed of Summer.

**The Story of My Life
by Rambo**

The days grow short as I grow old and I must hurry with my story. You need to know that I have had a long, good life. I won't be able to tell this story much longer because my breath comes in gasps and I know my time is short.

I am a refugee. When I was only about a year old, I had to leave my home. It wasn't anybody's fault; sometimes things happen. I was so young then that I didn't know about being homeless. I've talked with some who have been homeless and I should have been more worried than I was.

A miracle happened. When I had to leave my home, a family (I didn't know their names yet) took me in. That's why I am a refugee.

I used to live to run. Now I can't run anymore. Sometimes it is too hard just to climb the stairs now. When I lived to run, I could go for miles without looking back. I'd stop and explore whatever was in my path, but only for a moment, for I lived to run.

When I became a refugee, I was safe. I had a home. And the family that took me in knew I lived to run. The family, though, had rules that were new to me.

I could run, but only in a small space. Still, the wonderful food and drink, the pleasant life, my warm, soft bed were things I had not had before.

One day, my new family, remembering that I lived to run, took me to a running place. What a glorious spot. Cedar trees and oaks. Brambles and bushes. And the water's edge, rocky, cool, muddy. I ran until I thought my lungs would burst. I loved that day so much. I loved my family for knowing that I lived to run. It was such a good day, I couldn't stop telling them how much I loved it.

They must have really believed me, for after that they took me to my place, not every day, but very often, so that I could run. On those days I could not contain my joy. My loud shrieks of excitement as we came to my place, the wind in my face along the way, the feel of the sun on my back. Oh, how I lived to run.

One day, the family took in another refugee. She was very small and helpless and seemed a nuisance to me. At least she had her own room and I didn't have to share with her. Maybe I should pause here and tell you about this girl. She is pretty, and of course now that we're both adults, our age difference is not as significant. She's petite and graceful and soft. And more of a help to me now than a nuisance. I've even come to depend on her to remind me of important things.

When we take our sun naps together, I often wonder if she is daydreaming about the same things that I see. Squirrels on the telephone wires, bluejays on the fence, a field bunny venturing out from his home under the deck. All of that seemed more important to me when I lived to run. I raise my head and open my eyes lazily. "Do you think we'll go to the running place today?" I ask her.

"Are you sure you're up to it?" she responds.

I sigh. She knows me oh- so- well after all these years. I hear the love and concern in her voice. "Oh, yes," I say. "I'm never too tired for the running place."

But we both know better. My gasps are frequent. My time is short. More about her, this woman who has been so much in my life. It would have been easy to feel jealous of her. Our family did different things for her than they did for me. Sometimes they made her a softer bed or a warmer place. They favored her, I think, because of her leg. She limped and I thought they overprotected her.

I can take the credit for helping with her limp. One day at the running place, she hesitated. The stream was cool and rocky and wide. She didn't want to get her feet wet, but she was afraid to leap over the stream. I stopped and called to her, getting her attention. "C'mon. Don't be a sissy. Just plunge right through it. Like me. Watch." And I performed vigorously with all of my male dominance and pride. I tromped. I sloshed. I scattered pebbles. And finally, I sat right down and soaked in that stream. Then I got up and out and shook it all about.

She watched me intently, thinking. "No. No. Sorry. I could never do that. I don't want to get all muddy and wet."

Well, then, I thought, just stay behind and miss the best things about the running place. The cedars and the oaks. The bushes and the brambles. The water's edge. But instead, I said "Why don't you try to jump it? You have long legs. You're light. You can do it."

Her bright eyes studied me. Was I joshing her, setting her up for a fall, or was I her friend, trying to help? "I'm afraid," she said. "My bad leg might break."

I thought a minute. I looked up stream. A narrow place caught my eye. I walked up there, eyeing her to match my path on the other side of the stream. Not sure, but still safe, we walked together, separated by the stream. "Okay. Here we are. Jump."

"I can't," she said, shrinking from the edge, hanging her head.

"Okay, then. It's just a short distance. It's not deep. Just walk through it. Two steps." By this time I was getting a little disgusted. Girls are such babies. But I wanted to show her all the spaces in the running place. I wanted her to cross the stream.

I could see her considering this, her head tilted in that way she has of deciding, in her own good time. "No. I'm not going to get wet. I'll try to jump."

I wish I could have said, "I'll catch you, or I'll give you my hand." But I couldn't, and I didn't.

She circled back, getting a running start, her blue bandanna flying in the wind. Shoulders forward, nose pointed down, she leaped and sailed through the sky above the stream. She landed like a gymnast. It was beautiful.

"You did it, you were great, you did it," I pounded her with my joy at her success. And she, like a real woman, shrugged her shoulders as if she did this every day.

"Now," she said, "take me to the running place." We never mentioned her leg again. When the family favored her, I forgave them. In fact, most of the time I liked my way better.

We have become so close that I cannot imagine life without her. Where I'm going, there'll be others. But she won't be there. Not yet. I worry about her by herself. Maybe the family will take in another refugee. That would be good for her, and where I'm going, it won't matter to me.

Sometimes I think my family lives for me. They have made so many places just for me. My house is spacious and warm and the morning sun shines in. The man of the family built my house and then he got in and took a nap, testing to be sure it was dry and tight. He built me a special place for my sun naps too, with walkways and benches and steps, and oh, a water fountain that has my name on it.

Most of the time I don't think about what I've missed in my life. Oh, of course, I do love to swim, and I would do it everyday if I could. And sometimes I wonder what it would have been like to hunt and carry ducks ever so gently to my master. I've heard others talk about how strong and handsome I am, and I must admit I like it when people admire me.

Did I tell you that when we go to the running place we ride there in a pickup? My family has made it safe for us with leashes bolted to the floor of the truck. I ride there like a king, putting my face to the wind, letting my lips waffle, my tongue hang, my ears flap. Now that my time is short, I find it very difficult to get into the truck. I used to be able to jump right in.

I love it that my master knows I need help now. He lifts me in and fastens my leash and I still can do what I love best -- ride to the running place. When we ride in the pickup, we have some of our best times. Sometimes our family parks and goes in to a store for a few minutes and we often talk about them while we wait.

K. usually acts anxious and barks frantically when they walk off from the pickup. I'm too mature for that, and I just sit patiently, knowing she'll calm down soon. "You know they'll be back," I tell her. "They always come back."

"Well, yes. But I want to be sure they know that we will miss them," she sniffs. She cranes her neck, looking over the side of the truck.

"You know they'll be back," I repeat with just a trace of irritation in my voice. "They are the most reliable people I've ever known."

A tall man carrying a little boy comes up to us. "See the doggies? Don't they look nice in their bandannas? Uh. No. Don't touch them. They might bite."

I look steadily at him, trying to figure out why he thinks either of us would bite his baby boy. I mean really. He meets my gaze.

"Well, big fellow. You seem like a nice guy. Is it safe to touch you?" I extend my neck, smiling up at him. He taps the top of my head. He holds the boy so that he can tap me, too. I give the kid a nice wet kiss. "Uh Oh. Watch out. He'll get you all messy," he warns the little boy.

I never have figured out how to handle that. I mean, I know people want to be acknowledged, but they don't want a wet kiss. That's the only kind of kiss there is, isn't it?

One day we went to a new running place beside the river. It was a great wide open space and I explored every tree and statue and bench I could find. My family would throw the Frisbee for me and I would catch it and they'd throw it again. We played this game for a long time.

I missed the Frisbee once, even though I leaped as high as I could. It flew past me into the river. I jumped in and started swimming after it. My family kept screaming at me and it was hard to concentrate. I was paddling as fast as I could, but the current and that Frisbee were moving faster. I could feel my heart pounding and I could see the Frisbee moving farther out of sight.

The water was cold and rough and, even though I'm a strong swimmer, I could tell that I was wearing out. K. was running along the bank, barking and barking. It made me and my family nervous. "You fool! You fool! Can't you see that's dangerous? Forget the Frisbee. Turn back." Maybe she did make sense. But she didn't know anything about the code. My honor was at stake. If I lost a Frisbee, I was a failure. I couldn't answer her. I had to keep my eye on the prize and paddle with all my might.

My family, too, was screeching at me along the bank, calling me back. Suddenly my master waved a Frisbee in his hand. Caught off guard, I thought, well, how could that be it? But not being able to see a Frisbee in the water anymore, and not being sure that it wasn't the one my master waved, I turned and swam toward the bank. I shook

myself thoroughly and jumped for the Frisbee. But my master was too fast for me. He threw it into the back of the truck. I ran, leaped in, and began to chew the Frisbee vigorously.

K. jumped into the truck, too, although she hates it when I'm wet and smelly. I could tell by the look in her eyes that she was relieved and scared and mad at me all at once. Our master fastened our leashes and we were homeward bound. We have never gone to the river again. They think I don't hear them talk about it, but I do. They were scared I was going to get caught in the current and swept across the dam. Never. I'm tough and I know how to take care of myself.

Since I love water so much, one day we went to still another running place. A small public lake, not too far from home. When we finally found a stopping place, (I saw plenty of good stopping places before that, but my family is very particular) I could hardly wait to jump out and run for the water. It was a nice place. No drop off, just a muddy beach tapering into the lake. You could tell this was a popular place. Bottles and cans and potato chip sacks everywhere told me it was a popular place.

Finally, my master unsnapped my leash. I jumped out. Hot searing pain to my right front paw. But I knew if I made a sound, my master would worry and would put me back in the truck. I swam toward the center of the lake. I could see K. on the shore, gingerly maneuvering the bottles and cans. She hates trash and litter. Says it makes her feel tacky. Women. I never have figured that out. Trash is full of great smells, and I love to nose around the sacks and cans. Actually, I kind of like the taste of beer. I've had a little a time or two when it was spilled at a picnic.

Anyway, I just kept swimming in lazy circles, enjoying the end of summer. I could see the sun low across the lake. Not many more days like this. I know when the sun gets low, our trips to the running place are numbered. We'll have times of shorter rides, sometimes when the snow is flying, before we get to go to a running place. So, I soak it in. I look like a crocodile with just my big black shiny head above the water.

Finally my master calls to me and K. barks and I know it's time to go. I swim back to shore and start toward the truck. I wince at the pain in my paw, but I don't notice the blood trailing me through the mud.

"Oh, Jim! Rambo's hurt! He's bleeding." She is getting something from behind the seat. She hands Jim a big piece of cloth.

Jim says, "Oh, dear. Let's see your paw, Rambo dog." I feel silly, but I let him check it. "Well, I don't see any glass, but he has a cut on the pad." Jim tears the cloth into strips and wraps my paw. I feel like a fool. By the time we get home, it is really beginning to hurt. My family puts a clean bandage on my paw, along with something that stings a little, and then they pull one of Jim's old socks over the bandage and tie a ribbon around my leg to hold the sock on. I look absolutely ridiculous. I am glad that K. is the only one to see me like this except for my family.

Every day, twice a day, for almost two weeks, they change my bandage and give me a clean sock. Actually, I got so I kind of looked forward to it. I guess I landed on a broken bottle. We never went back to that running place either.

Jim and K. and I have a special running place close to home. We go there often and we know every square foot of it. Jim calls it the Haskell 400. It has woods and wetlands and wide open spaces. In the springtime it's full of birds and rabbits and squirrels and turtles and frogs and even skunks. What I like best about the Haskell 400 is how well I know it. Jim lets me run in any direction and he knows I'll come back. Sometimes he will lie on his back and look at the sky and K. and I will run around him and sniff and bark and pretend like we are going to wake him up.

It wasn't always so, but K. can run faster than I can now. Still, she always waits for me to catch up. I love it when the three of us go to the Haskell 400. It's our special place.

One very cold day K. and I were dressed up in white lace bandannas. It seemed a little strange to me, but I went along with it. One of the family's daughters had gotten married the night before, and frankly, that whole week we had felt a little neglected. It was a sunny cold day and we were glad to have a ride. We went out to a place where the water grass was wonderful after a spring rain. But this was January and no water, no grass in sight -- just a

lagoon of ice, glimmering in the sun. We jumped out of the truck and took off for the lagoon. K. slid clear across and I did too. We must have looked pretty out of control, but it was fun to do something new.

These days I nap more than I run, and in my dreams I see all the running places. To grow old here with those who love me, who remember how I lived to run -- that makes me happy and sad all at once.

My time is short. But my life has been filled with food and friends and smells and sun. Mostly I worry about how they will do without me. I know I'm going to a new running place. And there, I'll get a second wind.

A Brain Bouquet From Bloom's Taxonomy

A tulip, or a rose?
A morning glory, or a zinnia?
What would Mr. Bloom choose?
What metaphor should one use?

Knowledge

Maybe a sunflower is knowledge.
Exactly as a sunflower should be.
Exactly as a kindergartner would draw it.
Round. Exact Center. Straight stem.
Dependable petals in symmetrical order.
Ah. Yes.
Put a sunflower in the brain bouquet.
Everyone can agree that a sunflower IS a sunflower.

Comprehension

Comprehension is a little more complicated, but still simple.
How would a third grader draw a poppy?
Sort of a center. A stem that bends in the breeze.
Colors that are shades of one another, but related to red.
Of course, it is a flower, as he interprets it.
Another bloom for the brain bouquet.

Application

One bloom in the brain bouquet is homemade.
The fifth grader who made it examined very carefully
The sunflower.
He took apart the poppy.
He studied the centers and the petals and the stems.
He cut out colors piece by piece
To make a flower:
Somewhat like a sunflower, somewhat like a poppy.
He showed us that he knows and understand
How to make a bloom for the brain bouquet.
And he called it a sunpoppy.

Analysis

Loves me.
Loves me not.

Take the daisy apart.
Count the layers of the petals arranged with perfect equity.
Hold it in your hand.
Turn it over; turn it inside out.
Analyze the stem, the roots, and the leaves.
No part deceives.
It is what it is –
All together a daisy.
Another bloom for the brain bouquet.

Synthesis

Hybrid vigor.
Yes.
Mix and match colors...petals...stamens...pistils.
How about an amaryllis with thorns?
Or a rose with horns?
Allow your imagination
To take you
Into a world beyond
What you know
What you comprehend
What you can do
What you can take apart.
Create a flower
Not necessarily new to the world
But definitely new
To you.

Evaluation

One must have criteria. Therefore:
In terms of formal flowers
Of fixed design, of predictable color, and memorable fragrance
I like Asiatic lilies, roses, and glads.

In terms of casual flowers
Of impromptu design, of crazy colors, and twisting stems
I like petunias, and tulips, and pansies.

In terms of gardens
I like a mixture of casual elegance
With hardy grasses
Rounded rocks

Tumbling water
Friendly benches
And raging color
With blooms
From every page
Of The Farmers Almanac

A brain bouquet makes one think

About how these activities link.
No flower should we take for granted.
They all bloom where they are planted.

October 12, 1998
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