



IMPROMPTU POETRY ON THE BEACH
WITH JANET KUYPERS 06/29/11

IPB

BEACH POETS
WEDNESDAY 06/29/11

COQUINAS

1

I can't imagine
the number of times
I've been there

visiting Florida,
Christmas with my parents
a plastic tree
decorated
with sand dollars
and red

ribbons

eating Christmas dinner
listening to Johnny Mathis

and after the Irish coffee,
father with his brandy snifter
in hand
mother and the other
girls
putting away the dishes

the carolers would come,
walking in front of our home

singing "We wish you a
merry Christmas"
over and over again

we would walk outside
and the cool breeze
almost felt like Christmas
after the hot
humid days

and we would stand on our driveway
smile and nod

you could see down the road
all the candles in
paper bags
lining the street

and for a few lights
the bag

burned

2

and we would take
boat rides
off the coast
my parents and their friends
to a tiny island

dad drinking beer
sometimes steering the boat
control
the women sitting together in the shade
worrying about their hair

i would sit at the front
sunglasses, swimsuit and sunburn
feeling the wind
slapping me
in the face

and turning my head away from the boat
into the wind
away from them

to face it again

docking at a shoreline
everyone jumping out
little bags in their hands

the women go looking for shells
the men go barbecue

after an hour or two
the sandwiches, potato chips eaten
the soda and beer almost
gone

we turn around
and head back

we have conquered

3

and I remember
the coquinas

the little shells
you could find them alive
on the beaches north of the pier in
Naples

going to the beach
I would look for a spot
to find them

they were all my own

they burrowed their way into the
sand
to avoid the light
worming their way away from me

I unearthed a group of coquinas once,
fascinated with their color of
their shells, the way
they moved

before they could hide

I collected them
in a jar,
took them home with me

what did you teach me
what have you taught me to do
is this it
is this what it has become
is this what has become of me
of you of us

and I took them home

I added salt water and sand
but I couldn't feed them
I realized soon that they
would die

so I let them

BROKE THE REFLECTION

I dropped my mother's ashes
down into the water

I wanted them to sink down
but they just floated there

as they broke the reflection
of the sun

it reminded me
of Oahu in two thousand one

it was the sixtieth anniversary
of the day that lived in infamy

when over the U.S.S. Arizona
I would only photograph with my mind

the flowers I saw
dropped from another survivor

that floated along the water,
breaking the tension

of the oil still rising
from that sunken battleship

my face was ashen
as everything, too, still

broke the reflection
of the sun

YOU CANNOT BURN ME

how many times
do i have to travel around the sun
spinning, moving away
how much time will pass
for you to see
that you cannot burn me

UPDATE 2011

ON THE MAN WHO LOVED ME

It's approaching
the anniversary
since you died

but the anniversary
of the date we started dating
is closer

and though we dated
I never got too close
because I knew you'd pass away
at an early age

though I didn't know
it would be *that* early

I never got too close
you told me you loved me
and I think I hurt you
when I said I couldn't reciprocate

I think I felt the way you did
but I couldn't take the final leap

But I remember how you said
you loved me
then you would break up with me

it wouldn't break my heart, of course
it'd piss me off
when I *knew* I was better than you
and you had the audacity
to break up with *me*

but it's approaching that anniversary now
and all I wonder now
is how many chemicals they used in you
to preserve you,
before they buried you
and I wonder how well your flesh has held up
after you started to decompose

I'm sorry,
I don't want to think of you as decomposing
but I don't want to think of you as dead

so
do I need an update
or do I need these reminders
as it approaches our anniversary

MY FIRST TIME

there are some towns known for their food...

New Orleans has it's Po-Boy
Philadelphia has it's Philly Cheese Steak

and if you're in New York
and want to carry food out on a street
you better get a pizza slice
fold it in half
and eat it with one hand

And if you're in Chicago
(and you can't eat a deep-dish pizza
with one hand in the street)
you better get a Chicago-style Hot Dog
with yellow mustard, relish (the bright green kind),
hot peppers, tomatoes, onions, celery salt
and a pickle on top

I lived in Chicago all my life
frequented the tops of sky scrapers
visited legendary blues bars

but even when I was a meat eater
I never had a Chicago Hot Dog

just ketchup, please
I'll take the pickle on the side
and I don't even like hot peppers

but as we left the Planetarium today
I passed a Chicago-style hot dog vendor cart
and they listed Vegetarian Hot Dogs
as a choice for the Chicago Hot Dog

I passed it,
then I stopped.

walked back
and asked for a Vegetarian Hot Dog
with everything except the hot peppers

(and no,
ketchup is not included
when you say “everything”)

and when I got my paper-wrapped
Vegetarian Chicago Hot Dog
I was tempted to pull the pickle away
and they had to remind me
no,
that’s a part of the Chicago Hot Dog

so I put it all together
took a bite
then I took another
and another

and I thought,
I’ve been missing out
on this fantastic Chicago tradition
all my life

I heard the Chicago Hot Dogs
started during the Depression
because it was something cheap
you could sell it on the streets
and it was a full meal:
meat, bread, vegetables
all at a reasonable price

and I thought,
we Chicagoans had it all figured out
with a gooey, deep dish pizza
when you had the time to sit down
as well as a way
to make *any* hot dog taste awesome
when you wanted a treat on the street

I'M SURE WE KILLED IT

on the Galapagos Islands
new species of animals develop
to accommodate their immediate surroundings
and everything fits with nature

think of trees around the world:
there seems to be a tree
for the needs of every animal:
the eucalyptus and the Koala Bear,
woodpeckers to make holes in trees,
even think of the leaping and traversing of monkeys in the trees
or that even certain dead grasses are needed for locusts
animals thrive around trees producing food they can eat

in nature, every tree has its niche
and everything fills its need

unlike animals, we humans don't have a single tree:
we cut them down for building and heating our homes
we cut down rain forests to plant more orange groves
(you know, so our orange juice can taste worse, but cost less)

we cherish some for food, but destroy others:
we destroy the rain forests
which counteracts the human effect on global warming
we destroy the rain forests
that possibly possess the natural cures
for diseases that help us kill ourselves

maybe that's what we get

and maybe there once was a single tree for humans

I'm sure we killed it

ELEPHANTS CARRY THE WORLD

elephants carry the world
in a line
in a chain
they walk
hold up the earth

and i remember
sitting in the passenger seat
with you driving down the road
and two elephants
started walking down the street
in front of us

slow down,
get out of the way,
i thought

and as you started to pull over
i looked at you in a panic
and i said
“i don’t have my camera with me”

you pulled over,
and the two elephants
(one much larger than the other)
started walking across the street
and stopped right on the sidewalk
not three feet in front of us

we both just sat there
in shock and awe
until i watched
a man from a building across the street
come running toward us,
slowing down and stopping at a ledge
between us and the elephants

he placed some hard wrapped candies
on the ledge
and said to the elephants
“i thought you might like these”
and then slowly backed away

all I could think was
“how are they supposed to open candies
wrapped in plastic like this?
they don’t have opposable thumbs”

when you heard my thoughts
you said,
“elephants are highly intelligent creatures”

and i thought,
they carry the world, you know
as i then looked over
and saw these two elephants
get on large bicycles
and start to ride away

EVERYTHING WAS ALIVE AND DYING

I

I had a dream the other night
I walked out of the city
to a forest
and there were neatly paved bicycle paths
and trash cans every fifty feet
and trash every ten

and then a raccoon came right up to me
she had a few little baby raccoons
following her, it was so cute, I
wish I had my camera

and she spoke to me,
she said, thank you
thank you for not buying furs,
I know you humans are pretty smart,
you have to be able to figure out a way
to keep yourselves warm
without killing me

and I said, you know they don't
do it for warmth,
they do it for fashion, they do it
for power. And she said I know.
But thank you anyway.

II

Then I walked a little further
and there was a stray cat
she still had her little neon collar on
with a little bell
and she walked a few feet,
stretched her front paws,
oh, she looked so darling
and then she walked right up to me
and she said thank you
and I said for what?
And she just looked at me for a moment,
her little ears were standing straight up,
and then she said, you know,
in some countries I'm considered
a delicacy. And I said how
do you know of these things?
And she said
when somebody eats one of you
word gets around
and then she looked up at me again
and said, and in some countries
the cow is sacred. Wouldn't they
love to see how you humans
prepare them for slaughter, how you
hang them upside-down
and slit their throats
so their still beating hearts
will drain out all the blood for you
and she said isn't it funny
how arbitrary your decision
to eat meat is?
and I said, don't put me
in that category, I don't eat meat
and she said I know

III

And I walked deeper in to the forest
managed to get away from the
picnic tables and the outhouses
that lined the forest edges
the roaring cars gave way to the
rustling of tree branches
crackling of fallen leaves
under my step

when the wind tunneled through
the wind whistled and sang
as it flew past the bark

and leaves

I walked
listened to the crack of dead branches
under my feet
and I felt a branch against my shoulder
I looked up and I could hear
the trees speak to me,
and they said
thank you for letting the
endangered animals live here amongst us
we do think they're so pretty
and it would be a shame to see them go
and thank you for recycling paper
because you're saving us
for just a little while longer

we've been on this planet for so long
embedded in the earth
we do have souls, you know
you can hear it in our songs
we cling with our roots
we don't want to let go

and I said, but I don't do much,
I don't do enough
and they said we know
but we'll take what we can get

IV

and I woke up in a sweat

V

so tell me, Bob Dole
so tell me, Newt Gingrich
so tell me, Pat Buchanan
so tell me, Jesse Helms
if you woke up from that dream
would you be in a sweat, too?

VI

Do you even know why
we should save the rain forest?
Oh preserve the delicate balance,
just tear the whole forest down,
what difference does it make?
Put in some orange groves
so our concentrate orange juice
can be a little cheaper

did you know that medical researchers
have a very, very hard time
trying to come up with synthetic
cures for diseases on their own?
It helps them out a little if they can first
find the substance in nature.
A tree that appears in the rain forest
may be the only one of its species.
Or one like it may be two miles away,
instead of right next to it. I wonder
how many cures we've destroyed
to plant more orange groves.
Serves us right.

VII

You know my motives aren't selfless
I know that these things are worthwhile in my life

I'd like to find a cure to these diseases
before I die of them
and I'm not just a vegetarian
because I think it's wrong to kill an animal
unless I have to
I also know the excess protein
pulls the calcium away from my bones
and gives me osteoporosis
and the excess fat gives me heart attacks
and I also know that we could be feeding
ten times more people
with the same resources used for meat production

You know, I know you're looking at me
and calling me an extremist
but I'm sitting here, looking around me
looking at the destruction caused by family values
and thinking the right, moral, non-violent decisions
are also those extreme ones

VIII

everything is linked here
we destroy our animals
so we can be wasteful and violent
we destroy our plants
we destroy our earth
we're even destroying our air
we wreak havoc on the soil, on the atmosphere
we dump our wastes into our lakes
we pump aerosol cans and exhaust pipes

and you tell me I'm extreme

and these animals and forests keep calling out to me
the oceans, the wind

and I'm beginning to think
that we just keep doing it
because we don't know how to stop
and deep inside we feel the pain of
all that we've killed
and we try to control it by
popping a chemical-filled pain-killer

we live through the guilt
by taking caffeine, nicotine, morphine
and we keep ourselves thin with saccharin
and we keep ourselves sane with our alcohol poisoning
and when that's not enough
maybe a line of coke

maybe shoot ourselves in the head
in front of the mirror in the master bedroom
or maybe just take some pills
walk into the garage, turn on the car
and just
fall asleep

in the wild
you have no power over anyone else

now that we're civilized
we create our own wild

maybe when we have all this power
the only choice we have
is to destroy ourselves

and so we do

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