

As a Feather Falls

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DEDICATION

To the three that have sustained me: Nature, Faith and Poetry I dedicate this work.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	i
1 Prologue	1

AS A FEATHER FALLS

2	As the Great Heron Feather Falls	Pg #3
3	Ode to Powder Hill	7
4	A Walk in the Woods	10
5	A Mariner's True Love	17
6	Swimming In Rain	19
7	My Morning Swim	20
8	A Tiny Moth	24

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This includes, but is not limited to: Patty L, the Thelma to my Louise, Pammy B who saw me ugly cry and still loved me in the most important ways, Reneè V, Connie J-H, Meggie W. three peas in a pod, who know all my secrets, Brenda Arnold who shared her home and dog, Sami Estes, my daughter at heart, and Mary Thompson, truth speaker.

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I am grateful that anyone reads my work.

1 PROLOGUE

My friend Marty accompanied me to a reading of “As the Great Heron Feather Falls,” held at Norwalk Public Library as part of their Art & Text contest. He enjoyed the poem and said, “It’s about death, right?” At the time, I agreed, but I have changed my mind.

Sorry Marty.

It’s about life.

The brevity of life is akin to a feather dropping from the sky. We get one chance to make it beautiful.

My life is an attempt to make that fall a thing of beauty.

How to do that?

For me, it involves embracing Nature - a swim in ice water, hiking in the Boundary Waters, crossing the Gulf Stream on a sailboat, or a simple walk in the park.

To do it fully I rely on my Faith a faith in Something

Greater than myself, something I call the Creative
Source of Love.

I had been waiting to live, but once I got the
opportunity, I decided to say “Yes!” to every
experience that would enrich and inform what had
been the mundane workings of a housewife.

These are the musings that were evoked from the
experiences, or you could call it poems from a feather
as it falls.

May the One who picks me up, smile.
May you, too, say YES to life.



2 AS THE GREAT HERON FEATHER FALLS

I sat, paddle poised, in the middle of the lake
and saw it skip and swirl, skip and swirl
as it dropped from the tail of the great heron

It felt like a long, slow hour
but it was only seconds
of dancing, skipping, swirling

Before it landed near my canoe.

Nearly choked by the simple splendor
of that silent ballet,

A prayer claimed my being

When I go, and fall, letting loose
let it be like that
great heron feather - skipping,
swirling,
dropping.

One small feather catching the air and
pirouetting
in an act of beauty before landing in the only
canoe
on a large lake

to be retrieved by the smiling hands of One
who saw the dance and welcomes the loss.

Four friends, experienced in camping, invited me to join them in the Boundary Waters of Canada. I learned to portage, which is to carry a canoe as you hike between lakes, sleep on the ground and use a trowel to “do your business.” Every bit of it was an adventure, even more when a mama bear and her cub showed up to ravage our campsite.

Nature is full of surprises, including the Northern lights we saw as we paddled away from the bears; it is both brutal and beautiful. This poem attests to both and was written after a walk in the local park.



I sold most of my worldly goods and moved to the frozen north, attending tech school and moving into a whole new future. I was stunned the first time I read -20 degrees on my car console. I felt invaded when the cold froze my nasal hairs. I also felt invigorated and alive by the wind as it whipped through my four layers. My time in sub-zero temperatures only gave me a new appreciation for Spring, whenever and wherever it comes.

This poem was written to pay homage to a road in my New England town, where people do gather every night for the sunset.

3 ODE TO POWDER HILL

There is a road in my town
Where people gather to watch the sun go
down.
In the Spring, the trees are trimmed in red
Reminding us new life comes from dead.
Young and old, parked side-by-side
gather on the shoulder at eventide,
As the sun slips and drops
We catch our breath, listen for coughs
Seasons come. Seasons go.
I find comfort in the orchards' rows.
You and I will come and go
When and how, we never know.
But now we have a chance to hold things
close.
To appreciate this simple road and watch it
glow.



Being outside lifts my spirits, so it is no surprise that when I feel prompted to get into the frozen lake, I climb in.

We hear so much about affirmations, those repetitive phrases telling you “You are beautiful and loved!” And you are.

But, what about physical affirmations? I float, I fly, I run. My physical body affirms my life, that feeling of being alive. I go. I do. I belong here, no matter how unusual the setting might appear at first, the ocean, a lake, the forest, above the clouds.

I move to affirm the fact that I am alive in this place. I am at home here.

Consider a simple walk in the woods. You never know where it may lead.



4 A WALK IN THE WOODS

How long will it take for him
to figure out what's going on?

He said he loved me once, reflexively,

at the end of a phone call.

Later, he confided that he was scared

to take that step.

Let's hike to the summit,

I suggest. An enhanced walk

in the woods, he elaborates. Decaying

leaves, geometric basalt,

a snake squiggling by as the trees stand

sentinel. A large cedar,

uprooted, oxidized with black edges

on the underside died

clutching rocks to itself, grabbing onto

something that will not hold.

Was it here a year ago when I

passed with my grown children, when
my daughter mentioned how little
her life meant.

I like the pace you set, he says. We are
meandering, I think.

He peers into the dark hole in the trunk of a
tree.

Get your nose out of my house, I growl.

We giggle and trudge up to the chimney with
no house. A crumpled beer can
marked 'Truly' pokes out of the grass nearby.

My furry Bacchus, pulls me aside.

Here they come. They are going to attack us with their chatter.

Chat. Chat. Chat. We nod as they pass, barely responding to our presence.

We sigh, relieved but as we reach the clearing he gasps.

Aliens on steroids, the electrical wires held aloft on arms of rusting steel, crackle.

Is that normal? he asks,

and transforms into a modern Don Quixote raising his fists and snarling at the Star Wars forms charging up and down the mountain.

He cannot win

but we are both delighted by the fight.

He spots it first, the tree snapped by wind
laying in the crook of its neighbors, Nature's
see-saw,

perfectly balanced in the arms of others, a
fulcrum for us.

He leaves the path to gently push on one side
and the other rises.

Could I ride the old timber, I wonder.

Don't get me started, he answers.

Climb on, just don't put your feet underneath
he instructs.

I plant my seat and point my feet straight out
to either side.

He pulls down on his end.

I rise up, giggling. When he releases, I drop,
and then the timber

jumps again,

as if on its own.

There is still life in it.

We marvel.

How long did it take to create this pleasure
just for us?

He holds his end of the fallen trunk as I
dismount.

Oh God, I cry.

I am thinking of sandwiches thick with meat
and a layer of cheese.

I can't decide

- sharp cheddar or Emmentauler Swiss,

but suddenly I'm hungry.

.



I had the opportunity to cross the Gulf Stream on a 36-foot sailboat from Florida to the Bahamas. I do not know how to sail, but figured I would learn something and rarely get this experience. I wanted to be out in the ocean without land in sight. While picking up supplies before the crossing, I took this photo off a bridge at Ponce Inlet, Florida. Thank you to Denise D. for the title suggestion.

5 MARINER'S TRUE LOVE

A tiny boat on the bluest of seas,

Just a speck afloat

With you holding me.



I find affirmations in Nature, even weather others disdain - cold and rainy prompt me to go for a swim. This grey morning and the one below were photographed by Brad Snow and used with permission.

6 SWIMMING IN RAIN

I love to swim on rainy days, grey and grim.
It guarantees no one else will be in.
Will it let up? I wonder, doubt.
I'll be soaked the minute I step out.
I'll get wet before and after,
even during. It doesn't matter.
It feels soft, each drop on my skin.
Tiny trickles on my face, gentle rivers run.
Why waste the day missing the sun?
Each drop a saucer that spreads,
air bubbles sprinkle about
Like petals cast.
I enter in.



7 MY MORNING SWIM

The lake is calm, barely a ripple, as I push off
from the shore.

I stroke once, twice, my body primes for
more.

The water a murky green-brown
Chittering birds, the only sound.

A swan circles across the lake

Its second year without a mate.

A heron spooks, lifts off on 3-foot wings.

A crow caws, chickadees sing.

I hear the heron wings like leather snapping,
flying low, its mouth gaping.

Gnats dot the surface, sprinkled here and there.

Fish kisses nip the air.

I feel one brush my thigh

but neither of us falters just glide by.

I'm relieved there are no fishermen to stare
or nab a fish from this lovely lair.

It's my secret pleasure in early morning.

With the mist rising from the hills, the day's
warming.

I think how the natural world was meant to be
—perfect, pristine, balanced — including me.

I am admitted into this paradise every swim
throughout the day I hold the memory close,
— a shield against all that is grim.



Cobwebs cling to the grass on a cattle ranch in the early morning.

I worked where few women venture, testing pipeline in Texas. It gave me the income to finish school - tuition, rent, food and books.

Summer in Texas? Winter in Minnesota? I was told I had it all wrong.

Oh no. So much was So Right.

Early mornings like this were gifts. Cobwebs were strings of jewels. Perspective is everything

As we age, we need to say yes more often to so much of Nature, especially as it changes us.

Yes to greying hair, 'absolutely' to our sensual delights, 'alleluia' to our bodies. Those scars, stretch marks and laugh lines are beautiful. This body continues to give us great pleasure.

We only get one.

Affirm and embrace yours.

8 A TINY MOTH

Sweetheart, at night
I roast and rest, roast and rest,
the mattress soaked with red wine.

Thick lips of Bacchus
lying at the gate,
unable to mouth

the small arch of the neck and peck,
peck.

The flask whines.
The endemic touch

of simmering garlic!
Heat, heat the musk fogs
the kitchen like London at dusk.

To cook and eat,
what does it mean?
To satisfy, to bite.

The bridge will snap and fall.
Such blue grey wisps
make a condiment. They will not
satisfy

but knead gently around the room
devouring the willing
and hungry

enticing desperate lovers
like take-out and honeymoons,
the meat of breast and thighs

a chef in his kitchen
creating heat
flavors to tempt us

approved artist!
Warmth browns the buns
but later burns.

Three years, three years
I wait and baste.

Marinate.

I am too warm.
Your body
burns like a torch.

My body glows.
I am a lighthouse
flashing on and off all night.

I am burning into
translucent transcendence,
a tiny moth

stuck to the light.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cat Strav inspects aircraft engines using Non-Destructive Testing. She earned an MFA from Fairfield University in 2013 and is the mother of four, grandma to one.

