



Slices
of a
Life
Unfinished

Richard
Bruns

Excerpts
from

Slices of a Life Unfinished
by Richard Bruns

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80th Birthday

Taking my walker for a roll
the pair of us, both all used up,
match each other wheel to step
and step to wheel, oblivious

to the pairs of eyes staring at us
from within the arched eyebrows of
unanswered questions, while the questions
of others pierce an evening's calm skin.

Back-packer and hiker, the miles
charged to aching feet at end of day
amidst floods of wonder mixed
and mingled with time's ennui.

Every night we continue to dance, my
wheeled pal and I, curious eyes upon us
as, my own eyes closed, we wheel and deal
and dedicate silent songs to each other.

Memories of A Bad Night Long Ago

finding my friend in 1964
yelling in French to a man
who didn't speak Spanish and
yelling in Spanish to the man
who didn't speak French, neutrally
translating a cell-block argument,

he saw me waving at him from
the lobby and yelled at me in English -
Richard! Get me the hell out of here!
the hardest part after biking from
San Ysidro all the way back home
to Imperial Beach, the sun finally rising,

was telling his mom where he was
and that he had a bloodied white
cloth wrapped around his left hand
which hid a long slice that cut across
phalangeal tendons and skin and
muscle tissue demanding a bunch of

stitches to pull it all back together again

and she trying to pretend I didn't smell
bad after two round trips by bicycle
to Tijuana not to mention the after-
glow of a night of cheap Cointreau,
forgotten lost fights, and a whole cart-load

of bad luck beyond the ken of bad decisions
rendered worse in a forest of bad choices,
we the woodsmen chopping and swinging away
as though we knew what we were doing
but still driving us gamely across the border
to La cárcel de Tijuana to bail her son

out of a storied legend made painfully real,
the forthcoming mom-to-son lecture
softened with the stitches etching their
own pointed lessons learned in
Young Lives 101, this time, at least,
far more poignant even than a mother's worried
words to her son.

Quarantine

the scent of jasmine drifts
through the window
week-end farmers' market
shoppers shopping 6 feet apart
sellers wearing latex gloves
everyone masked with designer
N-95's and surgical cotton
the news turned on
then off again heeding
a call for world silence
the bird calls filling
the holes with song

A History of Pot

So

I sit down in my camping chair
outside in front of our house, and
with the little side table unfolded,
I set the stash box in the middle
and the box of matches next to it.

I

poke a long metal poultry nail
through the bowl and stem of my
small plated Chinese water pipe
to clear out the caked oil and ash
and place in its crusted bowl a fresh pot bud.

Even

as I do this each time I cannot help
but remember fifty-five years ago
pulling down the window shades
after shutting all the windows and
locking the doors before rolling a joint.

Incense

filled the front room and the whole San
Francisco
flat back then in a vain attempt to hide the
sweet illegal scent of a zig-zag doobie
as my future ex-wife and I passed
the 'J' back and forth, and to our friends.

Habit

wants to dominate my pleasure this day
as the edges of yesterday's fear borders
the edges of paranoia as though pushed
forward through the smoke of all those
long ago years buried in the dark ages.

Sheltering

my lit wooden match against
a slight breeze wafting under an autumn
warm blue sky, I puff life into the tiny
leafy lump of pot, and then draw its water-
cooled
essence into the courses of my mental
slipstream.

Hey,

man, when does this weed take effect,
it's already been ... and then I exhale
and the leaves of our trees begin
to pretend to glow, and my wife today
says, Man, you look like I'm stoned.

Pan Man 2025

leaning over the dish rack
placing steaming clean dishes
glasses and bowls on or between
metal pickets designed for just
that purpose, to wait for
an ambient breeze-way
to dry them quickly,
or if too impatient
grab a clean dry dishtowel
and do the job myself
each night I stumble through
the twists and turns of the closing day
the missteps, the wrong turns
the dead ends knowing I'll
wake up to find clean dishes
in the morning after bedding
down the night before
Pan Man Memories working
their way into dreams.

poems have been known
to see light following
the close of such a day.

i'm really not mad - but my dentist can prove it

1

omigod!

the dog's crapping the flowers.

my mother thinks i'm mad

and steals marbles from

my room when she thinks

i'm asleep.

wrapped in quilts of darkness

the moon spills

sheets to see by and i see it all:

the dog in the yard,

the door creaking open and

she sneaking in and out again.

2

wednesday night and

tired i run around the block

breathing well into the

night chasing vampyres with

a silver fork and wolves with a wooden spoon.

still it's nothing to me what

she does or does not do.

if i had my way i'd run

away four days at a

time returning early in the

morning for a change of

clothes and a quick and silent bath.

you can't just run naked and

be dirty all your life.

3

i know that in my next

life i will be a flower filling

a portion of earth with my

roots and shooting bees full of

pollen - i'll be yellow or blue or

perhaps an even lavender and
the sun will make me dance all
around the world and i won't
even have to move.

4

making potato wine one
night i noticed how much it
looked like water from the
uncompahgre river.
it even smelled a little more foul.
how great i thought to bottle
the uncompahgre selling it for
vintage potato wine at county
fairs and tarot readings.

5

you can't really blame him for
not going to the funeral even
though all the bills were paid
in advance and the invitations
sent out with flowers already
plucked at the stems and dying
all around the casket which by
the way was not opened for viewing.
he just never quite believed he
was really dead and refused to
play that way merely to avoid
his executor's embarrassment.
still he was good about it sent
his condolences along with
the rest and showed up at the
office monday morning like
usual with a black mourning
band wrapped around his
sleeve whistling "nearer my
god to thee."

6

i've got no time for
memories; the john needs
flushing and the flies are
rapidly making the salad
inedible.

i do my best though. got
the lights strung out for
christmas like last year and
cookies and hot chocolate for
the carolers to munch on and
warm up their cold winter
throats.

last year's cookies and
chocolate in fact the little
bastards!

7

seems like for everyone we
kill two more jump up to
replace them.

do you suppose if we brought a
few back to life they would
start to disappear?

8

i don't know what she's going
to do when i run out of
marbles.

Impotence

stung out of my heat
the rigidity collapses.
the furnace stoked too
quickly uses the fuel up.
my walls turn red as
tears put the fire out.
mother of my history
you forgot to instruct me.
in your chalk talk on the black
board of my youth you forgot
to explain the rules,
there were too many
too fast in the middle,
not enough at the beginning
where i burned, i burned
through the night of nights
and decided not to be consumed.
the furnace goes cold,
the light from my flesh fades,
the dark swallows the heat
up in loud awkward gulps-
the fuel hardens like knots,
sits cold in my stomach, waiting,
...waiting.

Schrödinger's Door

The front door is closed
awaiting a knock,
a knock-knock without.
No time has passed
yet the ending is near.
Open the box.
Don't open the box.
It does not matter.
The box itself is the matter
and it has already been seen
to be open and to be not open.
Like the front door
for which there is no knock.
If you walk in the woods,
if you walk alone in the woods,
if you listen carefully
you can hear it now,
the knock and
the not knock.

Zen Master

-Dr. Raymond Mitchell

twelve years ago
i asked of you a loan,
two hundred dollars
which you did not grant me.
being faulty i have still
not learned that lesson.
i was not a seeker then
but a borrower.
i am not a seeker now
but a lender.
tomorrow will be
another day.
everyone called you
zen master because
despite your wealth and phd
you worked in a liquor store
pushing a broom, waiting
on people who mostly
wouldn't wait
on themselves.
yet you helped me
select and buy the gift for d,
wine in a wineless country
when i was only nineteen.
when and if you receive
this thing of lines and words
and you choose to respond
it will be
i knew i'd be hearing
from you again,
in this time,
in this place,
in this way.
that
is the lesson.

Epiphany No. 1

-Lola

in my next life i
will come back as
my grey cat jésus
who laid next
to my woman and me
purring loudly
while
we balled.
my woman then
until i discovered
that she was not my woman
was no one's woman
except her own
and that i
was not her man.

Epiphany NO. 2

-Ruth

the bony nodule
around the healed
fracture is stronger
than any other
part of the bone-
if the bone breaks
again it will not break
where it was broken
before but will
seek a new place
to become stronger.

venus de mило

at the end of last autumn
when the first flowers appeared
venus de mило broke her arms
upon the head of a passing vagrant
who had commented on her nakedness.
the olive wreath that adorned his head
fell to the snowy flowers below,
crushed beneath her gentle arms.

over there

over there
behind the hill
there is a tribe
of savage people
waiting for us
to turn our backs.
wait a while.
we will get them
when we can.

Coda

-Amanda

when your turd
stuck fast in my toilet
you left me something
i will never forget.
that's difficult enough
in the best
of times.

Some Haiku/Senryu

in today's soup
a different
fly

over my mouth
my hand discovers
its purpose

morning pond ice ...
a mallard pair hit
the skids together

on a wooden box
the child fixes lunch-
and answers herself

broken vase...
our cat
lawyers up

Richard Bruns has won awards for short stories poetry, science fiction poetry, & photography. He has served as a judge for photo competitions & is a documentarian for political, social, & personal events. He has been an editor, a newspaper page designer, and a publisher. Under the influence of Russian River Poets Pat Nolan, Gail King, & others. Richard Bruns opened up Fiction West Press, publishing Fiction West, devoted to short stories. Using electronic stencils typed on one of the first dedicated word processors, the IBM-50; stencils were run on an A.B.Dick electric mimeograph machine. Richard is married to Judy, his wife of 45 years.