



**Three Angels Arrive - Singing  
Inner Cacophonies**

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**Three Angels Arrive - Singing: Inner Cacophonies  
Collected Poems**

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## **Introduction**

**I am an amateur poet. I read other's poems and know that my work is a pale imitation of real poetry. Poetry expresses that which is often ineffable and invisible in the world of material life. It enables us – however briefly – to touch that which is eternal. It gives expression – however feebly – to that which is spiritual within our existence. Poetry grows out of our lived existence rather than from the accumulated wisdom of our rational thinking and planning and ordering self.**

**Some of these poems stand alone; but others are inter-related as in aspects of the self in conversation with other aspects. Some of these poems began in pain; others began in delight. Both are aspects of my life as an old womyn. There is delight and joy and it is always tinged with pain. Another way to say this is that in old age there is pain of many kinds but what I have found in my life is that**

**there is also an underlay of joy and delight at that which is seasonal and at that which is always present as the foundation of my life to date. Suffering and joy; pain and delight; boredom and awe: the natural flow of daily life – chores to be done; scriptures of the world to read; observations of the natural world; weeds to be pulled; trash to be hauled away: there is both complexity and simplicity in my life these days. I seek to find words so that I don't miss life by not recognizing it.**

**As a visual thinker I may begin with an inner or intuitive image – and then I hunt the picture. The snow poems are one example; the burn-surviving tree another. In other situations, the picture arrives first – as in the three singing angels pictured on the cover. The interweaving of visual images and words is a reminder of how I think inside these kinds of autobiographical musings.**





## **Archetypal Wisdom**

**I've walked as far as I can walk  
There is no wiggle room  
There are no extant signs  
I've exhausted my resources  
No cairns are placed here  
No wisdom guides leave traces  
I've been white-knuckle driving  
The internal GPS is hopelessly damaged  
The inner rudder is stuck**

**I've mindlessly abandoned that which is  
trustworthy**

**The inner voices are accusatory**

**The outer voices tell lies**

**I've lost all of my marbles**

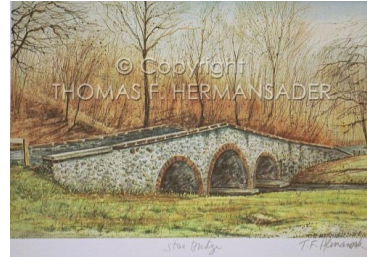
**I can't think my way into a different future**

**Three angels arrive – singing**

**March 21, 2019**

**Tucson, Arizona**

## Observations about Ending Relationships



### Bridges

**Bridges are built to connect things  
Or people**

**Bridges are built to cross spaces  
For people**

**Bridges are built to transport things  
By people**

**Four years ago  
Or was it five  
I sought to build a bridge between us  
So we could work together**

**I felt so immediately attached to you  
For your written words were bridges to my  
understanding**

**I attached my own marionette strings  
To your words**

**I bound my own feet inside tiny glass slippers  
I put blinders on my own eyes**

**I did not yet understand  
You use of silence as a weapon against being  
understood**

**I did not yet comprehend  
Your flattering duplicity as weaponry**

**I overlooked the obvious: your charm  
Was a hidden form of long-nourished rage  
against womyn**

**Now, these many months later**

**I am taking down the bridge – plank by plank  
Stone by stone  
Handrail by handrail**

**Soon there will be only empty space  
Between us**

**No longer the marionette on the public stage  
No longer the wind up ballerina toy  
No longer Tonto  
I will move free**

**My guides have been other men  
Known and unknown  
Kind and less kind**

**My guides have been other womyn  
Astute survivors of this kind of male nonsense  
Free Womyn, walking free**

**God's silence  
Can enslave us  
Or, alternatively, it can free us**

**We can choose to be billiard balls**

**Or, alternatively, we can choose to be the cue**

**It is our choice**

**De-constructing bridges is hard work**

**But it brings inner spaciousness**

**Four years, or is it five**

**I now choose to walk free<sub>ree</sub>**

**November 18, 2017, Tucson, Arizona**



## **Broken Bridges**

**These long days of summer  
Images of broken bridges  
Rise and fall  
Shimmer and disappear  
Chimera**

**June 30, 2018  
Tucson, Arizona**



## **Walking Away**



**Walking away – today's imagery unfolds**

**A snarky feral cat leads the way.  
The old woman unties the strings that bind her  
to the puppeteer  
She walks a fragile bridge across rivers –  
seeking safety**



**And, then, safe in her aloneness, she leaves.  
Steadfastly she walks towards the bright  
sunlight**

**July 13, 2018  
Tucson, Arizona**



## **Brokenness**

**Once upon a time  
I sought a living forest – filled with birdsong**

**The aging feral cat led the way  
Into a sickened forest of broken trees  
Too late I smelled the ancient sorcery of his  
home  
Much later I began to understand its failed  
logic**

**No forest birds sing here  
What or who killed their song is a mystery  
Why the music flew away, anyone's guess**

**Something has gone terribly wrong**

**I weep – not knowing why I weep  
Nor for whom I mourn**

**That which is broken is dead  
There is no loving tree  
There is no birdsong  
There will be no resurrection**

**The inner desecration is complete  
The forest and I become one**

**As silently as I arrived  
I back away, bowing my head in shame  
I am to blame  
I am responsible**

**Not knowing why  
I do not belong**

**July 15, 2018  
Tucson, Arizona**



## **The Lone She-Wolf**

**Once a valued and needed member  
Of her pack  
The aging she-wolf now lives alone**

**Driven out of her pack  
By the dominant male pack leader  
Because he does not see her**

**The aging she-wolf**

**Forages on her own  
For lunch and for safe hiding places**

**She must now live in precarious places  
Between (and among) multiple wolf packs  
Where she has no home**

**Her silenced voice  
No longer signals her presence  
As one wolf among many**

**She avoids contact  
By smelling scent traces  
But leaving none of her own**

**Reading about her  
I howl for her in protest  
She has been betrayed by her own**

**Like her I know about life on the margins  
I know about being betrayed  
Like her, I forage for life in the shadows**

**I know beyond any rational speech:**

**This aging she-wolf, so alive, so watchful, so  
hidden from view**

**She and I are soul mates: we understand each  
other.**

**As I search for new pathways for my life**

**New tasks to be done**

**She will accompany me in my dreams**

**Together we will live to see another day.**

**Undated: Summer, 2018**

**Tucson, Arizona**



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## **Chest Waders**

**Today, yesterday and the two days before that  
I needed ancient immunizations  
I needed polypropylene chest waders**

**This swamp I entered so polluted  
Its bridge to understanding so submerged  
Its waters so filled with rottenness**

**No ospreys eat their evening dinner here  
No frogs hop from leaf to limb  
No crickets sing at the full moon's light**

**Sulfuric fumes from Hades rise  
Every bloated scale-covered fish dies  
Disease-ridden mosquitoes rule**

**Alone, four days ago, I entered this swamp  
Seeking to understand its up-town presence  
Now, filthy to my soul, I understand this water  
hole is demonic**

**Tucson, AZ  
August 15, 2019**





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## **Foggy Bottom<sup>viii</sup>**

**In these poisoned forests and toxic swamps  
I am swimming in fog**

**Fog swimmers are embedded inside moods  
Of confused enchantment**

**In these polluted places  
Illusion masquerades as truth**

**Wading these toxic swamps  
Enmity and betrayal pretend friendship**

**Unwittingly captured by these thick brackish  
fogs**

**Poisoned information breaks one's internal  
rudder**

**Fog swimmers know one thing  
It is easy here to subvert one's own soul**

**Yet we must risk all we know  
To uncover the truths contained in toxic fog-  
covered forests**

**We must enter these polluted and foggy  
spaces of our lives  
To understand them**

**Inevitably we will lose our way – over and over  
and over  
Because the horizon is blurred by poisonous  
mists**

**There is no shining beacon light, no electronic  
signal  
Nothing but a small inner voice insisting on  
freedom**

**What we hope for; what we pray for  
Is for the fog to burn off by mid-day**

**What we beg all Gods for  
Is protection and safety as we make our way**

**Quite simply, each morning we will our own  
survival  
Inside each enchanted fog-shrouded moment**

**Encountering these fog-permeated forests  
change us  
Their swamps change our life directions**

**When we finally exit them for dry ground and  
warm sunlight  
The gods give us a new name: we are not who  
we were before**

**April 30, 2019  
Tucson, Arizona**



## **The Wall of Silence**

**I've taken to imagining  
This *wall of silence* around you  
As a fortified castle  
Complete with a dragon-filled moat  
And a rusted out drawbridge  
That remains closed at all times**

**I've taken to imagining  
A dense shroud-like *Silence of God* around you**

**From a distance it appears to be transcendent  
and immutable**

**For years I stood outside your well-fortified  
castle walls  
And stood on the other side of your mosquito-  
infested moat  
Wondering what it was that you so needed to  
protect  
Inside your inner dwelling**

**I carried no burning arrows  
I wore no armor  
I sent no threatening messages  
Indeed, I carefully spoke in *I messages*  
As my teachers and mentors taught me to do**

**Yesterday I carefully guided my footsteps  
away  
Silently I murmured to myself  
*This moat of God's silence is a poisonous  
boundary*  
*Within this castle there is no healing*  
*Its holy grail has been defiled***

**I walked away in search of open gates  
Transparent windows  
Lush gardens filled with wild strawberries  
Oak forests filled with black squirrels  
Oceans with clean tide pools for wading  
Quiet benches for talking**

**The malignant metaphor of this nightmare you  
live in  
Will not shatter in your lifetime  
You have not seen, nor recognized, what was  
in front of you**

**You are an integral part of the castle's tragic  
opera  
In which you both write and sing the notes**

**Ensconced inside the pain you know  
You refuse to consider new paths, new  
metaphors, new allies**

**You have refused the grail of collegial speech  
It either frightened you  
Distracted you  
Overwhelmed you**

**Or annoyed you**

**Thus, the grail will not return to you in your  
lifetime**

**The ancient wisdom remains clear to me:**

**We often prefer the pain we know**

**To an open pain-free future we do not know**

**The best way to predict the future is to know  
the past**

**The drawbridges and dragon-filled moats we  
build to protect us fail**

**For healing to occur we need shared speech**

**For the collective metaphor of evil-doing to  
shatter, we need others**

**We prefer the tragic opera we know**

**We dance the historical ballet we inherit**

**We replicate the trauma of shame and silence**

**The Grail walks in front of us**

**But you do not acknowledge its presence**

**March 31, 2019**

**Tucson, AZ**



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## **Reprise: Walking Away**

**Walking away to protect one own self sounds  
easy**

**Until we try to do it**

**Every upright bone protests**

**Every muscle refuses to agree**



**Eventually, the emotion of rage kicks in  
And the drive to get free of life's toxic  
nonsense takes over  
We empower ourselves with a certain kind of  
determination  
Which reason alone cannot achieve**

**Our nighttime dreams reveal the obscure  
truths of our lives  
In them we find ourselves – with no resources -  
inside polluted dreary cities  
Graying industrial camps of the heart with no  
exit and no hope  
Wheels within wheels spin false tales of the  
heart's enchantment**

**We knew better than to imprison our heart but  
we forgot  
Slowly we understand that we must will  
ourselves to courage  
We must, with stamina, rescue our own lives  
We must take control of our sadness**

**We refuse to do this spirit freedom work  
quietly  
We refuse to stay invisible  
We deliberately begin to leave footprints  
We start to create the songs of our freedom**

**Every Exodus story begins inside imprisonment  
and slavery  
Every Exodus story documents heroic  
decisions to break free  
Every Exodus story speaks of broken and cast  
aside mental shackles  
Every Exodus story ends inside a new country  
of the heart**

**Inside this journey out of our enchantment  
The Gods sometimes speak - but not always**

**Inside this isolated journey  
The lust for freedom must become a blazing  
beacon**

**One day the troubled dreams of entrapment  
stop**

**They have been our guide all along**

**Eventually the rolling waves of our intention  
carry us forward**

**Freedom demands paying attention and  
making trustworthy choices**

**Eventually we walk ourselves free**

**Once more we become visible to our own self**

**May 2, 2019**

**Tucson, Arizona**



## **Ancient Scars**

**Even healthy forests  
Reveal ancient scar tissue  
Silently witnesses to terrifying fire  
Somewhere in the ancient past**

**People who know these trees  
And forests  
Tell us that blazing hot fires  
Are essential to the survival of the forest**

**These ancient trees  
Can resist fires that blaze  
Baby trees  
Are not that lucky**

**Seeing the wounds of fires past  
In today's quiet groves of sun and shade  
We read a cyclical history of fire and life in the  
forest's survival  
We also read the unique history of this  
particular tree  
Ancient fire-scarred giants  
Hold the history of the forest  
They survived the fire  
Their seeds carry the forest's survival into the  
future**

**Surviving, this old tree is now surrounded by  
young trees  
Growing in the fire-opened sun-filled space  
surrounding it  
After fire swept the debris-littered forest floor  
Fire-popped seeds brought new life**

**They say – whoever they are –  
That whatever fire doesn't destroy you  
Make you strong  
And brings new life**

**These days I wake up thinking about rage  
As a blazing fire  
Even as I seek to contain its danger  
I know it can bring healing and create a space  
for new life**

**Just as fire and new life are co-dependent  
realities  
In these ancient Sequoia groves  
So remembered ancient rages and survival  
must co-exist  
In today's present moments**

**It is our ancient scar tissue that protects us  
It is our memory of rage-fires that holds us  
steady  
When we touch these ancient scars in our  
mind  
We find new ways to survive**

**Just as we do not know what this tree would  
be**

**Had there been no fire**

**We do not know who we would be**

**Had there been no moments of danger and  
protesting rage**

**Not all trees survive**

**That sobering reality surrounds me these days**

**In my determination to survive**

**My confusion and its accompanying rage**

**I pay attention to my waking questions**

**I pay attention to my incoherent dreams**

**I pay attention to the world around me**

**I am a survivor of the fire**

**May 5, 2019**

**Tucson, Arizona**

## **Walking Away – A Manifesto Reprised**



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**There are as many ways  
To walk away as there are individuals  
Each heart has its own reasons**

**There are so many different ways  
That the heart can choose  
To walk away**

**Each way of leaving  
Teaches us new skills and we gradually learn  
The whys, ways, and reasons for leaving**



**We can tip-toe, stride, run, or walk sideways  
Each speaks the wisdom of the heart  
Our choice speaks its own wisdom**

**We can back away slowly  
Or race forward as fast as the wind towards  
the unknown  
What we choose is propelled by our thoughts**

**Our own heart – having sensed its own needs  
Having scouted out its many options  
Chooses the specific way to leave only when  
we can no longer stay**

**Our grief at deciding to leave  
Clings to our soul in protest  
Delays our departure by hours, days, months or  
years**

**We try to leave and fail  
We give up in weak resignation  
We see ourselves as inadequate and  
undeserving of our freedom**

**Then one morning we wake up and we leave  
It may take others minutes, hours, days,  
weeks, months, or years  
To realize and to acknowledge our absence**

**But we now walk free of their non-awakening,  
of their non-presence  
We claim back our own one precious life  
Our stride strengthens; our smiles widen**

**The sun is bright  
The air is clean and fresh  
The birds are singing**

**We dance a jig at the red stoplight  
When it turns green we race forward  
We don't yet know our destination but it lies in  
front of us**

**The decision to leave was marked by *I can do  
so much better than this*  
The day of leaving was marked by tears  
The walk of our freedom is marked by singing  
and laughter**

**We lay claim to our freedom  
We smile and take deep breaths  
We are alive again and we are free**

**We have learned once more  
The cost of freedom is simple: decide and act  
The price of this freedom is grief, rage and  
tears**

**We have learned yet again  
The cost-benefit ratio of claiming our own lives  
As our own to live in our own unique way**

**We walk free. We sing with the spirit  
And with the understanding also  
Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.**

**October 5, 2019  
Tucson, Arizona**



## **Troubled Bridges**

**My troubled mind  
Roams free these days  
As it seeks to understand bridges  
And pet alligators as guardians of these  
bridges**

**October 24, 2019  
Tucson, AZ**

## **Snow and Ice**



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### **Morning Snow**

**I woke this morning  
And a deep silence surrounded me**

**During the night  
Snow colored this desert white  
With fresh snow**

**My neighbor's trees  
Stood as sentinels'  
To this unfamiliar whiteness**

**My wall wore snow  
Like a chocolate cake  
Wears powdered sugar icing**

**In this rare silence  
My heart sang  
Once more the joys of winter**

**January 2, 2019  
Tucson, Arizona**



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**Snow silence**

**Snow silence  
Penetrates my ears  
With joy**

**January 2, 2019  
Tucson, Arizona**





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## **The Desert's Seasons**

**The Sonoran Desert has its seasons  
Just as a human life has  
In any given moment all is unpredictable  
Yet in a life of seasons, all is predictable**

**We are born  
And we will die  
It is the in-between parts where we are  
surprised by deep joy**



**Overtaken by awe at life's rare beauty  
We celebrate snow where there should be no  
snow  
We bow a deep bow to these ancient giants  
They will outlive us**

**Namaste, Saguaro, Namaste**

**December 23, 2019  
Tucson, Arizona**

## **Vis-à-vis Aging**



**Grow Old with Me – the Best is Yet to Be: NOT**

**I can no longer tell you my friend  
How life looks to me in this season of life  
I can no longer tell you who I am  
Because you no longer remember who you are**

**This time of life you so feared for so many  
years  
Has captured you**

**I miss you immensely  
You knew who I was  
More importantly you knew who you were**

**Both of us agnostic ex-Mennonites  
Both of us aging feminist womyn  
Both of us readers of poetry  
Both of us entranced by our love of music  
Both of us singers  
Both of us nurse-healers  
Both of us friends  
Both of us sisters**

**I remember your mother's fried chicken  
It was to die for**

**You remembered being "shocked"  
Upon learning that I loved country music  
How I laughed when you told me this**

**Wonder Women: Avon, Ellen, Phyllis and Ruth  
Nurse, daughter, sister, parent, grandparent,  
Aunt, teacher, executive, gardener, wife  
Single, married, widow with small children,  
infertile, childless**

**We met life's adversities by supporting each  
other**

**We celebrated life's joys by sharing them**

**Avon has already crossed over**

**You, Ellen, have now entered the permanent  
fog of not-remembering**

**Phyllis and I electronically watch over you at a  
distance**

**We both know we will never see you again**

**We are not even sure we will ever see each  
other again**

**I must be – but am not – comforted by this  
knowing**

**I weep for all you have lost**

**I bow low in gratitude for this place of safety in  
your life**

**Every day I think about you  
I know that we will never giggle and guffaw  
again  
We will never eat that shared story-telling  
dinner once more  
Christmas gingerbread house parties no longer  
happen each year  
They exist only in others' memories  
You no longer go to soccer games to see your  
grandkids win or lose  
The Easter baskets and stuffed bunnies have  
gone to Goodwill  
Family trips to water parks and school plays  
are over for good  
Hospice board meetings now meet without you  
Somebody else gives flu shots to hospital  
employees  
The giggler I gave you so many years ago is  
silent  
Our fifty-fifth reunion went on without us;  
number sixty looms  
We will not be there**

**This morning I weep at your absence from my  
life**

**I miss you so much**

**Each day I think about you  
Each day I pray for your safety**

**I do not know what else to do  
This is such a sad and lonely helplessness**

**Phyllis tells me that the white azalea you and I  
gave her**

**When her mom died**

**Still lives and thrives**

**Even hurricanes and torrential rains have not  
destroyed it**

**When I see white orchids in the grocery store**

**I think of the last one you gave me**

**And smile that you remembered orchids are my  
favorite flower**

**The flowers of a lifetime are a symbol of our  
love, Ellen, for each other  
These storms of aging do not destroy love  
Rather, they remind us of each other**

**I first met you when I was sixteen years old  
and you were nineteen  
We met again when I was nineteen and you  
were twenty-two  
I was still financially dependent on my parents;  
you were already grown-up**

**I emotionally supported you  
During the horrid Reba Place years  
They were such a barren place and time in  
your life**

**You emotionally supported me during the  
cancer years  
You supported me as I walked away from Ed**

**Through our tears we laughed  
We sang together  
We shared poetry we loved**

**We got facials and manicures  
We hugged and held each other's hands  
And sometimes we cursed and swore  
With a vengeance that startled both of us**

**Know this my beloved friend:  
I will carry you in my heart as long as I live  
You have enriched my life in so very many  
ways  
For so many years  
I love you**

**For Ellen (Ellen Esther Jones Hackman)  
Tucson, AZ, March 25, 2019**





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## **Old Womyn**

**My rage erupted today  
I screamed  
Silently so no one could hear**

**I was counting mentors and teachers  
And they were mostly men**

**I reviewed my culture's official history  
And they were mostly men**

**I reviewed Christian preachers and pastors  
And they were mostly men**

**I thought about the sexual abuse advocacy  
teams  
And they were mostly men**

**To be sure**

- **There were Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Ida B. Wells Barnett, Sojourner Truth, Amelia Bloomer, and Alice Paul**
- **There were Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Blackwell, Margaret Sanger, Jane Adams**
- **There were Rachel Carson, Jane Goodall, Barbara McClintock, Sor Juana de la Cruz**
- **There were Judy Chicago, Georgia O'Keefe, Dorothea Lange**
- **There was Nelle Morton**
- **There were my mother's Aunt Mabel and Aunt Gertrude**
- **There was Bertha Huber**
- **There was my Aunt Margaret**
- **There were the saints: Teresa of Avilla, Julian of Norwich, Hildegarde of Bingen,**

**Catherine of Sienna, Therese Lisieux - the Little Flower (but what we know of their lives is told in male voices)**

- **There were Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde**
- **There were Marian Anderson, Jessye Norman**
- **There were Mahalia Jackson, Aretha Franklin**
- **There were Clara Gilchrist, Mary Oyer**

**Judy Chicago's Dinner Party list is more extensive**

**But no history course taught me  
About these women's lives and their  
contributions**

**My rage is not about being mentored by men  
My rage is not about my contemporaries**

**It was just that reviewing the rapes  
Done by the gods of mortals, immortals, and a  
wide variety of animals  
These stories are the inherited history of every  
woman alive today**

**I want a different history  
I need old womyn – the womyn history has  
buried  
Sometimes literally – as witches, as infidels, as  
heretics  
More often as irrelevant**

**Now an old woman, I am bereft of guide and  
stories  
I am denied my history**

**I am enraged by patriarchy's theft of my  
history as a woman  
I am enraged by patriarchal men who deny me  
a voice because I am old  
Just as other important men  
Have denied and erases the voices of old  
womyn before me**

**I need these old womyn  
Buried inside millennial graves and catacombs  
And I cannot find them**

**Today I weep in rage**

**I am determined to honor these abandoned  
womyn**

**These raped womyn**

**These womyn forced to marry men they did not  
choose**

**These womyn who often died after too many  
pregnancies**

**These womyn denied education**

**These womyn with impoverished selves**

**These womyn who survived men's organized  
disdain**

**These womyn who prayed to a colonized virgin  
mother**

**I do not know their names**

**But I know they are my ancestors**

**They are my inheritance**

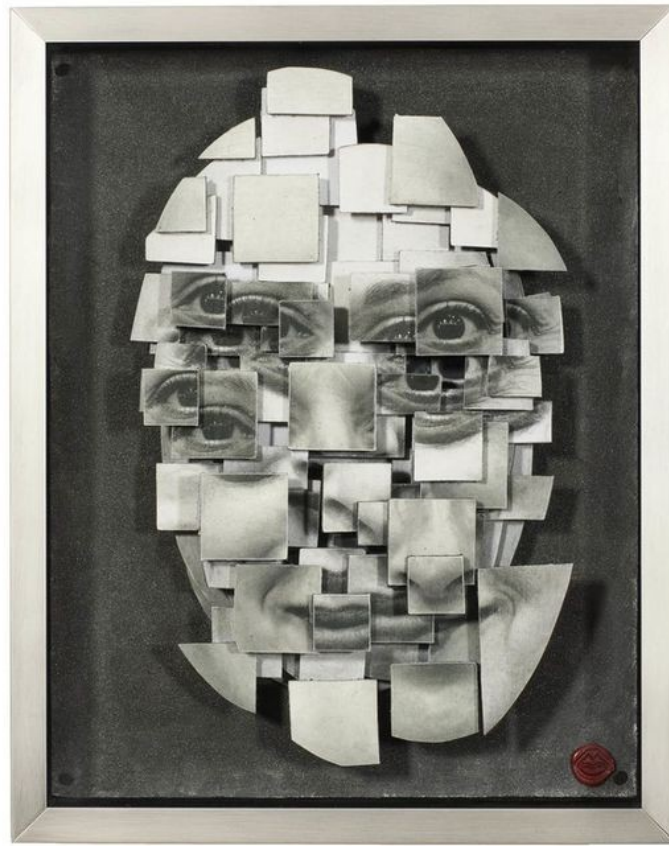
**I weep in rage**

**I weep in deep grief**

**I weep in rage**

**There can be no consolation for this loss  
There will be no acceptance of this absence  
I both cannot and will not be comforted**

**April 24, 2019  
Tucson, Arizona**



xvi

## **Fragmentos**

**In these aging days of my life  
I live in fragments  
Every night dream  
Obscene or lucid  
Sweet or terrifying  
Contains bits and shreds of my life**

**It is not my face I see in the mirror  
A white-haired stranger lives there  
And lies in wait for me**

**November 27, 2019  
Tucson, Arizona**





xvii

## **Grief's Healing**

**I've been thinking about grief  
Mine and others  
It comes in waves like a tsunami**

**Grief denied and grief delayed  
Bite us in the ass  
Leaving deep fanged wounds**

**Grief held close in and silent  
Poisons the inner life  
Deepening our alienation from others**

**Grief lovingly held up to the sunlight  
Opens pathways to healing  
We never saw before something important died**

**When one door of our heart slams closed  
And its locked room becomes a morgue  
We must create new doors in order to live**

**November 30, 2019  
Tucson, Arizona**

## **Miscellany**



xviii

### **Coteries**

**Role exclusivity is never pretty  
Nor is it particularly smart**

**Building a social ordering of social exclusion  
Stops the flow of goodwill**

**Digging a brackish moat of self-protection  
Isolates us from receiving essential  
information**

**Enclosing one's imaginal Self  
Inside fortified boundaries builds disdain for  
the other**

**Needed in-course corrections for action  
Get hi-jacked by group-think**

**This complex inner desire to protect one's life  
By ignoring the warning voices of concerned  
others**

**This disdain for the contributions of outsiders  
Means that outsider and insider never meet as  
equals**

**Coterie breed rage and rage overtakes  
compassion  
Insiders circle the wagons of projection**

**Coteries breed the body's isolation from wisdom**

**Block synergy**

**Punish creativity**

**Bring injustice**

**Breed paranoia**

**Create a treadmill of unchanging expectations**

**The Johari Model<sup>xix</sup> is clear**

**Effective working groups**

**Encourage the voice of everyone**

**Emphasize listening carefully to the ideas of others**

**Learn to know each other**

**Share that which is known**

**Explore that which is not yet known**

**Collaborate and investigate**

**Celebrate success**

**Tolerate failure**

**Endure and persevere**

**I think of this as asking the self**

**In every work group**

***Who belongs at this table of conversation?***

***Who is missing for our work group to be complete?***

***How do we facilitate speech for everyone?***

***In what moments can we seek synergy together?***

***In what moments can we find the speech that breaks open dead bromides?***

***Dare we bravely allow the old clichés to shatter?***

***Is it possible to break open the coterie's hard outer shell?***

***Where do we make it possible for newness to emerge?***

***Can we, in Nelle Morton's language, hear each other into speech?***

***If we do nothing else, can we at least be kind and courteous?***

***Can we acknowledge, with deep courtesy, another's' full humanity?***

***To judge and to exclude others as undesirables  
Such disdain brands these others with a red-hot branding iron***

***It announces: exclusion at all costs***

**To isolate and exclude others as irrelevant  
Says perhaps more about our own weaknesses  
Than we can afford to know and to  
acknowledge**

**More importantly, perhaps  
Such branding also brands its brander  
Burning souls  
Isolating from truth**

**In the long-run  
In the unending arc of history  
Coteries of power lose more than they gain  
Destroy more than they create  
Bury more than they give birth**

**March 15, 2019  
Tucson, Arizona**



## **Iris Osprey Speaks**

**Learn from me**

**But do not seek to make me human**

**I can teach you many things**

**But do not seek to make me a god**



**My ethics of living are not your ways  
Your ways of thinking are not my ways**

**I soar and I dive  
I fish and I continue to thrive**

**When my life falls apart,  
At least by human rules, I survive**

**When my male osprey mate abandons me  
I lift my wings and go fishing**

**When intruder female ospreys seek to settle in  
my nest  
Or adult bald eagles seek to grab my daily fish,  
I act in self-interest**

**In the cold months of snow, sleet and hail  
I fly south**

**In the humid months of hurricanes and hot  
winds  
I migrate north**

**My instincts are strong and true  
They protect me and I trust them**

**My nest is only a temporary home  
My permanent home flies with me**

**May 13, 2019  
Tucson, Arizona**



**The black widow spider is omnipresent these days**

**She eats her mate after mating**

**I first met a black widow**

**In the Academy**

**And, yes, she did eat her young**

**Those students who dared to question her**  
**Those students who were brave enough to**  
**challenge her**  
**Those students who were smarter than she**

**I watched from afar**  
**Helpless to teach her how to teach**  
**Without eating her young**

**May 2, 2027**  
**Tucson, Arizona**



## **Alligators in the Sink**

**Sometimes there be alligators in the sink  
Waiting for some dirty dishes to feed upon  
They be nasty critters  
Hiding inside drains  
Invading our night dreams**

**November 25, 2019  
Tucson, AZ**





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***Lilith becomes what all tyrants fear: a person who is aware she is enslaved.<sup>xxii</sup>***

**Lilith**

**I am the original**

**Adam's first wife**

**The template for healthy womyn**

**The model for self-possessed and secure womyn**

**Religious men have taken my story and  
demonized me  
But I am no demon  
I am simply a woman who resisted obeying  
Adam  
And God**

**I refused to submit  
I refused to be subordinated  
I refused to be overpowered  
I refused to obey  
I refused to be controlled  
I refused to be compelled**

**I divorced Adam  
I flew away – outside the garden's wall  
And there I found a tree to house me  
Shade to shelter me**

**For that religious men demonize me  
They say I am a baby-killer  
They say I am a bad influence  
Sigh**

**I've been around since**

- **Sumer (ca 3000 BCE)**
- **Ancient Syria (ca 700 BCE)**
- **Pre-Christian Israel (ca 500 BCE)**

**Like that of my younger sister Eve, my good  
name has been trashed**

**My story so distorted that I don't recognize  
myself in it.**

**No wonder I flew away from Eden  
To live free outside its walls**

**Only when Adam was hanging out somewhere  
else**

**Did I visit Eve**

**Over time she and I became friends**

**Telling each other the stories of Adam's  
abusive weakness**

**Whispering to each other about God's  
oppressive maleness**



**Obedience, not love, became the marker  
Of Adam's demands  
Of God's demands**

**Now, thanks to Jewish womyn scholars  
I have returned to instruct all womyn  
About religious men's seductive need to abuse  
women and their children  
Inside theologies of Eve's total responsibility  
for human pain in childbirth  
Tell me how that conclusion makes any  
damned sense at all.**

**My story is now known  
It is on the internet  
It is in books  
It is in the hearts of womyn**

**I have abandoned my tree  
I have returned  
I am now living inside the walls of the garden  
I am no longer silent**

**Listen up womyn  
Listen up.**

**May 20, 2019  
Tucson, Arizona**



## **An Ode to Books**

### **A wall of books**

**Bears testimony to our human passion to  
know**

### **A wall of books**

**Testifies to our deep need to understand**

**A wall of books**

**Incites the lust to re-visit that which is old**

**A wall of books**

**Signals the presence of human literacy**

**A wall of books**

**Lures me like a worm on a fishhook lures a trout**

**A wall of books excites the brain's neurons**

**And fires up our human desire to know –  
something, anything**

**A wall of books**

**Asks the question: *what treasures wait within***

**A wall of books**

**Teaches us about the Gods and worlds  
unseen**

**A wall of books**

**Tutors us about worlds real and worlds  
fantasized as real**

**A wall of books**

**Mysterious, luring, lying in wait, prescient,  
enduring, timeless**

**A wall of books ..... and a ladder  
Heaven on earth**

**September 7, 2019  
Tucson, AZ**



xxiv

## **Ennui**

**These hot days of August  
Sap my spirit  
And all I want to do is to sleep**

**Even getting dressed  
Defeats me  
Before I get started**

**Never mind  
Doing the needed chores  
They will need to wait**

**I fill my water glass  
And it is empty in minutes  
My thirst continues**

**Another nap calls  
A nap I most assuredly do not need  
But will take**

**August 19, 2019:  
Tucson, AZ:  
Temperature – 108 degrees**



**Kauai's Kalama, (2017) on the verge of fledging**

**Aloha Kalama – Tender Lessons from Kauai**

**The lessons from 2017 were simple  
But they remain with me still**

**Stand on the ocean's edge  
That edge of the known and the unknown  
Smell the wind**



**Trust your genes  
Flap your wings  
Step of the cliff**

**Fly**

**December 26, 2019  
Tucson, Arizona**



## **Gifts From Afar**

**I must be crazy  
To keep hoping that I can please her  
No gift is adequate to the task  
Of easing her pain  
Of cooling her anger**

**Of speaking sisterly love to her  
Yet, again this season of Navidad  
I tried once more to find a gift  
That might please her  
That might bring her joy  
That might bring her a sense of being family  
That might tell her she is not forgotten in her  
suffering**

**She is my sister  
Nothing I do pleases her  
I must, somehow or other,  
In ways I do not comprehend  
I must remind her of her suffering  
In ways she cannot tolerate**

**Her anger at me seems ageless  
As if it never changes  
I do not know its source  
But as my only sister  
I sense her fulminating, explosive rage  
Across time and miles**

**This tiny bulb does not require care  
It carries no hidden despised calories with it  
It does not demand anything but sunlight  
And air currents bearing warmth  
Maybe it will be acceptable to her  
And, just perhaps, bring her peace**

**December 28, 2019  
Tucson, Arizona**



xxvi

**The Labyrinth of Our Lives  
For my former students**

**On the cusp of a new year  
We pause to recall the year now past  
To take stock of our lives  
To remember our beloved dead  
And our not-so-beloved dead**

**On the cusp of a new year  
We pause to dream new dreams  
To tally up our logs of unfinished work  
To consider our hopes and our fears  
To make resolutions**

**On the cusp of a new year  
We tidy up our living spaces  
Check the pantry  
Do the laundry  
Wash the dishes and take out the trash**

**On the cusp of a new year  
The labyrinth of our lives  
Comes into focus for one brief moment  
We touch the earth  
And the sacred nearness appears in the  
distance**

**On the cusp of a new year  
For just a moment  
We cast the cards  
Recalling who we are  
Remembering the journey of our lives**

**On the cusp of a new year  
Gratitude for our life flows like artesian springs  
Bubbling up inside us  
That which is done is done  
That which is past is past**

**On the cusp of a new year  
The lure of our future glistens like fairy dust  
Filled with speculation, hopes, prayers, and  
plans  
Knowing that the future is inscrutable  
It, nevertheless, beckons us with its luminosity**

**On the cusp of a new year  
That which has been a maze to solve  
Becomes a labyrinth of awakening to walk**

**We are not who we were when this past year  
began**

**We are not yet who we will become tomorrow**

**On the cusp of a new year**

**Our lives unfold in ways we could never have  
imagined**

**Some things we see so clearly**

**Other things remain a haze of distraction and  
disaffiliation**

**Yet, that which we have loved remains**

**On the cusp of a new year**

**We mourn our dead but celebrate their lives**

**We count our losses but are not defined by  
hem**

**We honor our sadness in the midst of joy**

**Some things are ageless but we are mortal**

**On the cusp of a new year**

**We walk the labyrinth of our lives**

**Knowing that the walking is the point of it all**

**Not the entrance or the center or the exit**

**It is in the walking that we learn to become  
our own home**



**On the cusp of a new year  
In my friend Nelle's immortal words  
We learn that this journey is not about our  
beginning  
It is not about our ending  
Instead, the journey itself is our permanent  
home**

**December 31, 2019  
Tucson, Arizona**

**Note: January 4, 2020: Linda Mickel (*Little Journeys on the Path*) will publish this next December (2020) in the Veriditas newsletter.**

## **A Time to Mourn; a Time to Weep**



xxvii

***Mathew 2:18 Rachel weeps for her children for they are no more; they are not with her and she does not know where they have been taken.***

**Raquel Weeps for Her Children**

**Today, not only Raquel weeps  
Her children, held in custody, weep**

**For Raquel has been sent away  
Perhaps to be seen no more**

**Seeing these weeping children in cages  
I weep for my country  
And for what it has become  
A citadel of cruelty and injustice**

**Children torn from the arms of their mothers  
Left in cages  
Without access to the thing every child needs  
A parent's love and protection**

**My rage and my grief  
Compete for my attention  
My helplessness enrages me  
My sadness engulfs me**

**This is the face of American conservative  
evangelicalism  
This is the true face of the American empire  
This is the true face of the American  
presidency  
This is, whether or not I like it, our true face as  
a people**

**I do not consent**

**My rage and my grief do not comfort the child**

**They do not comfort the child's mother**

**They do not change a god-damned thing.**

**August 14, 2019**

**Tucson, Arizona**



xxviii

**When the Heroes Fall**

**When the heroes fall  
Who remains?**

**When the heroes fall  
What is left?**

**When the heroes fall  
Where does hope arrive?**

**When the heroes fall  
How do we hear the music?**

**When the heroes fall  
What remains?**

**August 16, 2019  
Tucson, Arizona**



xxix

## **Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico and Douglas, Arizona, USA**

### **Soul Wound**

**Today's USA travel advisory warns against  
crossing this border**

**I hate this wall**

**Once Mexico**

**Now the United States<sup>xxx</sup>**

**An old man at the Mission told me  
*Your people stole this land***

**On upon a time on this now-divided land  
Cousin gringo played pick-up games of street  
soccer with primo mexicano**

**Now guns, drugs, thugs, thieves, and walls  
Roam these streets**

**Today primo mexicano hates cousin gringo  
Cousin gringo returns the favor**

**Once a peaceful playground  
Now a war zone**

**Children now disdain and hate their primos and  
cousins  
No more the pick-up games, Spanglish, and  
children's laughter**

**Now, adults are forbidden easy access to each  
other's streets  
Once favorite restaurants are closed**



**I miss primo mexicano**

**These days my mind's tongue speaks only  
English**

**My soul swears endless curses at this wall  
But my heart weeps**

**November 4, 2019**

**Tucson, Arizona**



xxxi

## **Impeachment**

**Three times in one lifetime is too many  
Nixon, Clinton, Trump (not to mention Agnew  
and Mitchell)**

**Corruption in government sucks  
Jeremiah warns us: *it is a harbinger of  
imminent disaster***

***Witnessing evil-doing from their starry thrones***

**The Gods wince**

**December 13, 2019**

**Tucson, AZ**



**The 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States**

## **The Night after the Day Before**

**A damned fucking scary man  
Not one honorable bone in his body  
Nor one compassionate red blood cell  
His emotional body is cancerous  
He pisses pure bile  
He shits malice  
His tongue spits fury and rage  
He has a heart guarded by razor wire  
And his body carries a rusted out soul**

**Southern white Christian evangelicals love him  
So, too, do prominent Catholic bishops  
Ditto, obedient Mormons**

**He terrifies me**



xxxii

**December 19, 2019**

**Playing Poker<sup>xxxiii</sup>**

**Life is like playing poker**

**We must play the hand we are dealt**

**Winning has as much to do with our courage  
As it has to do with the cards handed to us by  
the dealer**

**Cards and courage  
A winning combination**

**December 20, 2019  
Tucson, AZ**

## **Christmas Day, 2019**



## **Reuniting the Refugee Child with Her Mother**



**Rachel wept for her children because they  
were not with her**

**Christmas Day, 2019**

**Tucson, AZ**



**January 3, 2020, Baghdad**  
**The Assassination of Iran's Major General**  
**Qassem Solenani**

**Young men head to a war**  
**They didn't start**  
**And that they won't end**

**Their lives to date**  
**Defined by youth and naiveté**  
**Are now changed forever**

**The haunting of war  
Lies implacably in their pathway  
As they enter a future they cannot imagine**

**As surely as I sit here writing  
Hell waits patiently for them to arrive  
And they will enter it on command**

**One man's violent death  
Is certain to lure more violent deaths  
Suffering, and shattered selves**

**It is a truism; violence begets violence  
Wars breed and whelp wars one after another  
Hell's doorways are always open**

**Shoulder to shoulder  
Invisible, unseen, inaudible, unheard,  
implacable, insatiable  
The snarling poltergeists of hell march with  
them**

**January 4, 2020  
Tucson, Arizona**

## **Afterword**

**I have pulled these poems together into one volume. They are pulled from journals and from poems that emerged, as it seemed to me, whole. Some have been deliberately constructed but many simply fell out of my soul unto the computer screen. In trying to find my way – particularly after the SNAP MENNO debacle of 2016-2017 – I needed to find my way back into meaningful work and trustworthy others. And as it always does, life kept happening and I needed to keep adjusting to its sameness and its newness. My friend Ellen's descent into dementia was reflected by my friend Jane's similar descent. My friend Jim Goering died suddenly. Richard Sipe died after a long illness/ A group of Goshen College faculty and former faculty died: J.R. Burkholder, Lawrence Burkholder, Carolyn Schrock Shank, Lon Shearer, Norma Jean Weldy, & Randy Gunden, Deb Brubaker.**

**Underlying my dys-ease in the world was the political reality of a nation guided by Donald Trump, religious conservatives – a fundamentalist bunch of theocratic evangelicals who began separating small children and adolescents from their parents even as they built walls on the border. The erosion of human rights for people of color, people of a wide variety of sexual orientations, refugees, and womyn.....all contributed to my despair.**

**As did the continuing revelations of sexual abuse by religious leaders – Christian in its multiple forms, Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, etc.**

**The three singing monkeys are named Tom, Dick, and Harry – and they have traveled a great distance with me during these past years. Their picture makes me laugh and giggle and snort.**

**I am going to bind these and a new collection will begin – with an as yet unknown title.**

## Endnotes

**Bridge:** <https://ost.edu/events/bridges-contemplative-living-thomas-merton-book-one/2017-09-26/>

ii **Hanging bridge:**

[https://fineartamerica.com/products/jungle-journey-skip-nall-art-print.html?gclid=Cj0KCQiA0b\\_QBRCEARIsAFntQ9p20bASusovMwWClwrsx2u25ar68DxS9zLvm\\_OrPD-JQLR1AhsmwN4aAIVeEALw\\_wcB](https://fineartamerica.com/products/jungle-journey-skip-nall-art-print.html?gclid=Cj0KCQiA0b_QBRCEARIsAFntQ9p20bASusovMwWClwrsx2u25ar68DxS9zLvm_OrPD-JQLR1AhsmwN4aAIVeEALw_wcB)

iii **Stone Bridge, keystone bridge:**

<http://www.hermansadersartgallery.com/gallery.asp?G=8&Image=71>

iv <http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/2825126>

v <https://animals.howstuffworks.com/mammals/lone-wolf1.htm>

**(5) The Lone Wolf Picture; source now lost. Sigh.**

vi **Written after finishing a four day marathon read of Martel, F. (2019). *In the Closet of the Vatican: Power, Homosexuality, Hypocrisy*. Stuart Whiteside, translator. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Continuum.**

vii <https://hdwallsbox.com/dawn-dead-tree-fog-forests-frost-wallpaper-132365/>

viii **Foggy Bottom is a geographical area in the Potomac River Basin/Georgetown area of Washington, DC. I am**

**using the phrase as a metaphor for internal fog rather than for this geographical fog**

<sup>ix</sup> <https://www.spirare.name/footprints-sand-margaret-fishback-powers/>

**x**

<http://www.redwoodhikes.com/Sequoias.html>

<sup>xi</sup>

<https://www.featurepics.com/online/ThreeAlligatorsLayingBridgePics65145.aspx>

<sup>xii</sup>

<http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/real-time/Philadelphia-snowstorm-scenes-conditions-photos->

<sup>xiii</sup> [https://www.google.com/search?](https://www.google.com/search?q=pictures+of+Queen+Anne%27s+Lace+in+the+snow&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS703US703&espv=2&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjBl8iewZDTAhXHgFQKHUjZA6gQ7AkIOg&biw=819&bih=490#imgsrc=J1tal5t3H7_4sM:)

[q=pictures+of+Queen+Anne](https://www.google.com/search?q=pictures+of+Queen+Anne%27s+Lace+in+the+snow&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS703US703&espv=2&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjBl8iewZDTAhXHgFQKHUjZA6gQ7AkIOg&biw=819&bih=490#imgsrc=J1tal5t3H7_4sM:)

[%27s+Lace+in+the+snow&rlz=1C1CHBF\\_enUS703US703&espv=2&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjBl8iewZDTAhXHgFQKHUjZA6gQ7AkIOg&biw=819&bih=490#imgsrc=J1tal5t3H7\\_4sM:](https://www.google.com/search?q=pictures+of+Queen+Anne%27s+Lace+in+the+snow&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS703US703&espv=2&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjBl8iewZDTAhXHgFQKHUjZA6gQ7AkIOg&biw=819&bih=490#imgsrc=J1tal5t3H7_4sM:)

<sup>xiv</sup> **Photo by Flickr' KGUN, December 23, 2019**

<sup>xv</sup> <https://dianablography.wordpress.com/2012/02/27/old-women-black-and-white/>

**xvi**

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/358036239106330428/>

<sup>xvii</sup> **Picture retrieved November 30, 2019 from**

<https://upliftconnect.com/what-nobody-ever-says-about-grieving/>; **After finishing *You Can Heal Your Heart*:**



***Finding Peace After a Breakup, Divorce or Death* by  
Louise Hay and David Kessler (2014) Carlsbad, CA: Hay  
House Press**

<sup>xviii</sup> **Closed Circle of Influence,**

**[https://andyxianwong.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/business\\_people\\_circle1-33975034\\_std.jpg](https://andyxianwong.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/business_people_circle1-33975034_std.jpg)**

**Coterie: A small group of people with shared interests or tastes ...especially one that is exclusive of other people**

<sup>xix</sup> **<https://www.communicationtheory.org/the-johari-window-model/>**

<sup>xx</sup>

**[https://twitter.com/Lmatteau66/status/1127768669549805569?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Eembeddedtimeline%7Ctwterm%5Eprofile%3AHellgateOsprey%7Ctwcon%5Etimelinechrome&ref\\_url=http%3A%2F%2Fcams.allaboutbirds.org%2Fchannel%2F27%2FHellgate Ospreys%2F](https://twitter.com/Lmatteau66/status/1127768669549805569?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Eembeddedtimeline%7Ctwterm%5Eprofile%3AHellgateOsprey%7Ctwcon%5Etimelinechrome&ref_url=http%3A%2F%2Fcams.allaboutbirds.org%2Fchannel%2F27%2FHellgate%20Ospreys%2F)**

<sup>xxi</sup> **Lilith. See,**

**<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/lilith-lady-flying-in-darkness/>**

<sup>xxii</sup> **Ibid.**

<sup>xxiii</sup>

**<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/steelmagnificat/2019/09/>**

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**xxiv**

**<https://guerrillajobhunting.typepad.com/.a/6a00d83451f3a369e2015437258f92970c-popup>**

xxv

**<https://twitter.com/AlbatrossCam/status/876213317714427904>**

**xxvi**

**<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/95560823319160863/>**

**xxvii**

**<https://www.pexels.com/photo/boy-child-crying-iraq-39815/>**

xxviii

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xxxiii **In honor of Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the U.S. House of  
Representatives, as she negotiates with Mitch  
McConnell, U. S. Senate Majority Leader**