

This is a book of poetry with sixty-six poems which I have recently written plus fifteen poems which have appeared in my two previously published books of poetry.

COUNTING RAINDROPS

By Gary McGregor

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The background is a solid, deep red color with a subtle, flowing texture that resembles draped fabric. A faint, dark shadow of a palm frond is visible, extending from the bottom right towards the center of the page. The text is centered and rendered in a white, classic serif font.

Counting Raindrops

POEMS

Gary McGregor

Counting Raindrops

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ISBN: 978-1-64438-910-2

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.
2020

First Edition

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First Born

I count the raindrops running down
the windowpane as I while away
the hours remembering little things.

The small red peppers that mother
grew in large terra cotta pots
I was warned not to touch or taste,
but did. She found me stuffing cold
butter in my mouth to stop the burn.

The pink bubble gum I chewed, and
bubbles I blew after mother showed
me how. The RC cola she taught
me to shake, fizz, and watch it spew.

We laughed and laughed.

We cooked eggs outside over a small
fire. She called it camping out; tied a
band with one feather around my head,
and named me her little Indian warrior.

I felt strong and brave.

We gathered moss from shady places
to line a shallow hollow on the ground
a realm for Oberon and Titania to hold
court at night, she said.

We hunted small white pebbles placing
them in circles for the fairies to sit upon

I believed

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In a dusty place she showed me the tiny
holes where enchanted “doodlebugs”
made homes. We slid a straw into the
holes and twirled it round and round
while she softly sang her special chant
to entice the mysterious bugs to appear.
One never did, but

I was convinced

She was young, and I was her first child.
She was planting wonder in my
capacious mind, a fertile verve that
has flourished from that seed, and
a wonder that has never waned.

MAYAN CODEX DECIPHERED

Lost words filled pages
undecipherable for centuries,
read at last for history's eye.

Burned by zealous monks
as the devils work now reveal
truths long hidden.

Spared from the flames of a
great Mayan library, only one
chapter of a noble civilization
brought forth from the shadows.

Most answers were lost in flames,
and the ensuing darkness of silence.

We wonder still what other
bold mysteries were consumed in
those fires of misguided men.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Clouds of small birds swerve in mass flight
as one body, swooping to the left, then right.
Scooping up the sun warmed air, dropping
into the bare branches of winter trees looking
like a springtime set of new leaves.

Then suddenly, as swiftly as before, winging
off again in startled frenzy like a herd of
wild buffalos at the sound of heavy thunder,
or a mindless horde of hysterical humans
stampeding at the sound of gunfire.

Follow the leader, follow the leader.

PASSING TIME

Time after time, anytime,
in olden times, mark time,
keep time. It's time to go.
I can buy time, before
time began, central time,
eastern time, morning time,
night time, a long time ago,
happy times, and sad times,
noon time, hard times.
Have the time of your life,
well it's about time, next
time or the time before,
what time is it? Spring time,
summer time, the time it
takes to do something, a year
a century, is a measurement
of time, a lifetime, We waste
time, spend time, arrive in
the nick of time, well timed,
in good time, time out, time
table. It's time tested, time
worn. How many times have
I told you, time after time.
Now I've run out of time,
but if I find any extra time,
I will try to think of all those
other times that time is used.
Well, perhaps another time

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*The following three poems are called “minute” poems
written in a prescribed syllable and line count.*

DREAMS

He thought his dreams were surely dead,
buried, he said
by the soft hell
of living well.

Building a house, buying a car,
a tug of war
between demand,
and what one can.

Then deep in the hole he had made
there lay arrayed
his dreams, now found,
and life rewound.

HOME AT LAST

You will put patience to the test
wanting to rest.
Hospital halls,
noisy as malls.

Nurses make a constant clatter.
It doesn't matter
day time, night time,
always up time.

If not a shot, blood pressure check.
But what the heck,
I'm now okay.
It's home today.

SCROOGE

I promise you next year there'll be
a pre-lit tree.
'cause that's for sure
the only cure

for tangled nerves and tangled lights.
My Bill of Rights
will verify
my battle cry.

As for other aggravations;
decorations.
I advocate
pre-decorate.

GRANDMOTHERS HOUSE

is still there, much smaller
than I remember. Front steps too
steep . I fell; telltale scar on my
forehead, the porch, her rocker.

Where is the large red oak,
the pink Ann Sheffield camellia?
Where the fragile asparagus fern
kissing the shade on the north side?

And in the back, rampant weeds
grow where stood a storage
building. Its dusty treasures
echo even now in my heart.

Large gold fish swam in a pond.
I fished with a string, a bent pin,
and a piece of oatmeal but
never catching one.

The poignant scent of short
needled pine drifts from trees
now much taller than I can
remember.

The ghosts of climbing yellow
roses blooming at the back door
compel me to this forgotten block
of Walnut street, this house,
this home, a clinging memory.

MY SOUTHERN SAGE

Three white horses with great sweeping wings,
high above the house,
angels leaving earth, she said.
Someone had passed but not crossed over yet.
She could read the signs.

When a sudden chill wind sent goose bumps
across your skin,
a spirit from the other side had come to talk.
She could read the signs.

With chicken bones and small white stones
she made “gris, gris”,
her magic to keep me from harm.
She knew the way.

Sang songs, songs of her people,
deep dark purple notes,
joyful and mournful.

Now, before the altar of her church
she lies in funeral splendor,
eulogized and lionized.

The frenzied choir rattles the rafters of the sanctuary.
Women faint, big men sweat,
crying out for God to take her home.

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A sudden shiver of remembrance
cracks away from me,
and I knew in that moment
my southern sage had just
crossed over to the other side.

THE SWEET OLIVE TREE

I know the stump of that old sweet olive tree
Should not mean anything at all to me,
but it does, and every time that I pass by
I ask myself the question, why?

Perhaps it's the memory of that flowery
perfume that floated through the open
window of my mother's bedroom.

That tree was planted just outside, you know
with care, and the sure knowledge of which
way the breeze would blow.

Well, the tree is gone. It was probably cut
by someone who keeps his windows shut.

Now when I pass by, and see the stump
of that old sweet olive tree, I always think
of mother, and the cool fragrance of her room
in those summer times of long ago
when sweet olives were in bloom.

THINGS WE SAVE

While searching for a missing document
I opened the bottom drawer of a mostly
unused filing cabinet that holds the kind
of stuff one should have thrown away.
There sat a toy fire truck, the color all
fire trucks are, fire engine red.

I pause for a moment in my search, the
fire truck in my hand, to remember the
boy who grew up here, and raced this
truck down the hall to fight a make-
believe conflagration.

He called tonight, and I asked if the fire
truck had belonged to him.
Does it have extension ladders on the back?
Yes, I said.
Are there tiny hoses hanging on the sides?
Yes, I said.
Then it was mine, he said.
Do you want it?
Yes, he said. I want it.

The little red fire truck will go back
in this file drawer, then in other years
drawers in other towns in other homes.
Tales will be told to many small boys.
It will be saved again and again,
and again and again for years to come.

BROTHERLY LOVE

I told you of a horrible monster
under the bed, and you dared not put
your foot off the side because little
girls were monster food. I pretended
it had grabbed, and bitten my foot.
You screamed and screamed.

That was brotherly love.

It was a ball of kite string stretched
from door knob to closet hinge,
to window latch, to chair, and back
again another way; a spider web to
entangle when you came in when
called, screaming the screams I relished.

That was brotherly love.

I held flashlight under my chin in a
darkened room while reciting Poe's
"The Raven", then laughed a diabolical
laugh to scare your pants off, and
loved the screams of my willing victim.

That was brotherly love.

When I invited you into a blanket tent, the
corners held by a closet door, a closed
drawer, and a pile of books on my desk,
you crawled under to join me in my

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secret hide-away. You felt special, and thankful, and only a little apprehensive.

That also was brotherly love.

In your middle teens when you came in late, past your curfew, I jumped out to surprise you. Your screams awakened our parents, and we were both in trouble. I thought it grand, and worth it all.

That too was brotherly love.

The years piled up and we parted ways, and left all that behind. We have lived our married lives apart in different places. The brotherly love that haunted our childhood so long ago has become a rich sounding board that now echoes that love.

Brother for sister, sister for brother.

SECRETS

Our father and mother sometimes cannot remember things they told us about their lives when they were young; memories they had almost forgotten but were still part of who they were.

For my boy father it was the glare bleaching the surface of the water as he sat beneath the bridge on old river road in a small boat with his new 22 rifle imagining he could paddle down river as far as he wanted.

Now as an old man, he lay in the hospital dying. Did he find that bridge, that small boat, and with his new rifle, paddle down river as far as he had always wished?

For my mother it came to be the black and white keys of a piano, being taught to play when young and beautiful, performing for her parents, and how they clapped and clapped, and she was thrilled as she told it later.

And then one afternoon, from a gurney in the hall of a hospital, said she loved me very much, and not to worry, she would be alright, but a short time later in intensive care I was allowed to hold her lifeless hand and kiss her already cold cheek.

THE PHOTO ALBUM

This navy blue dress, her Sunday best,
plain, no pleats, and soft around the neck,
the only adornment, a gros-grain ribbon band
circling the crown of a wide brim hat.

The purse she holds is large and dark blue.
She stands very straight, tight lipped, now
caught in the moment by an almost
imperceptible shadow of a smile.

The man who stands beside her, shirt collar
open to the wet heat of summer, stern,
unsmiling seemed to be saying----

*“Hurry now, Maggie if you want a ride
to church. I’ve got to feed my dogs,
clean my gun. No time for picture
taking, woman. Let’s go”*

That man in the photo, my grandfather
taught me how to clean a tiny quail so all
the feathers came away with the skin, and
to shoot a gun before I really should have.

I remember grandmother making butter,
the slushing sound of churning, pouring the
residual milk over cornbread in a glass for me,
spreading cool butter and sugar on bread
for boy child sandwiches.

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Looking at the photos in this album of memories,
I grow wistful and nostalgic.
“What treasures, these people”..

TRANSMUTATION

It's bizarre how thoughts I've had all
day transmute in the darkness of night,
brainwork reshuffled.
Problems, fears arrive through doors
not there before.

I begin a journey through a strangers eye.
The terrible silence of reason grows ever
distant, a silence that begs a shiver or
at least a whimper.

Uninvited phantoms unveil themselves,
play catch-up with one another until
I've tagged them all.
The word "sleep" becomes a mantra,
crowds all other thought.

Now the long wait begins, and the
night will do with less telling.

THE PAINTED URN

There is a painted concrete urn in my garden.
On the left side of the urn
one can see an accidental face
in the surface smears,
a narrow face, long hair, sad downcast eyes.
If I was more than mildly pious
I would proclaim it looks like Jesus
or at least the artist's version.
I shudder to imagine if this got out;
the face of Jesus on my garden urn.

First would come the neighbors, then the town,
and soon after, pilgrims on every road.
Like the miracle seekers of Medjugorje,
the crowds at Fatima, they would come.
My garden overrun, trampled underfoot and knee.
The house abandoned, my life a ruin.

But then again, I could trumpet
the face of Kahlil Gibran.
Both looks are Middle Eastern,
but the poets and the writers
might feel compelled to make a hajj,
and that too would be vexatious.

So I'll wisely forget the face,
turn the urn against the garden wall,
and quietly plant a red geranium
in its well instead.

DOWNTOWN

Where Pine crosses Main, when I had just turned ten,
first time downtown alone, sidewalks six feet wide,

parallel parking, three five and ten's in one block
selling everything in the world a boy might want.

Two corner drugstores with sit-down soda fountains,
two banks, two department stores, two office buildings,

five movie theaters parading the cream of Hollywood.
Shining stars I would remember for the rest of my life.

At the bottom of the hill, a great steam engine belching
smoke and sound, pulled a train, often blocking Main.

To the west a livery stable, also an auto company;
a future moving too fast for some things to catch up.

Sears-Roebuck with its vast candy counter sprawled
where now sits the USA Federal Courthouse

Next the YMCA . I took swimming lessons there at nine.
Required to swim naked; too shy, I soon dropped out.

The public library on the corner, with its sweeping steps,
held the tickets to all the world if you sought adventure.

Me wide-eyed, forever changing, forever revealing an
Unquenchable, gargantuan desire for finding out all
there was, and all there is to know.

HEIRLOOM

On this table lies my grandmother's Bible passed on to me containing all the books of the Old and New Testament printed during the reign of Benedict XV on thin paper which I am reluctant to touch for fear I might damage its one hundred and four year old pages heavy together in their cover of faded black linen.

She was young living in a two store town, and I imagined a salesman coming to her door one day selling this Bible handsomely printed on fine paper at an unrepeatable price, and it seemed it would be a wonderful thing just to own it. Now its cover is worn as though it had been carried by her on trips all over the world but it has always been here; the treasure in her hands.

On an empty page just behind the front cover in a small neat handwriting are the names of her five children and their birth dates: *John Louis, Aileen, Margaret, Mary Catherine, and Robert Stephen.* All good Scottish names.

The Bible now frayed, pages loosened from the binding betray its treasured years. A sign of the many times she took it

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in her hands, always with care and love,
and with a quiet unwavering reverence,
turning the pages patiently, never doubting
that prayers would be answered.

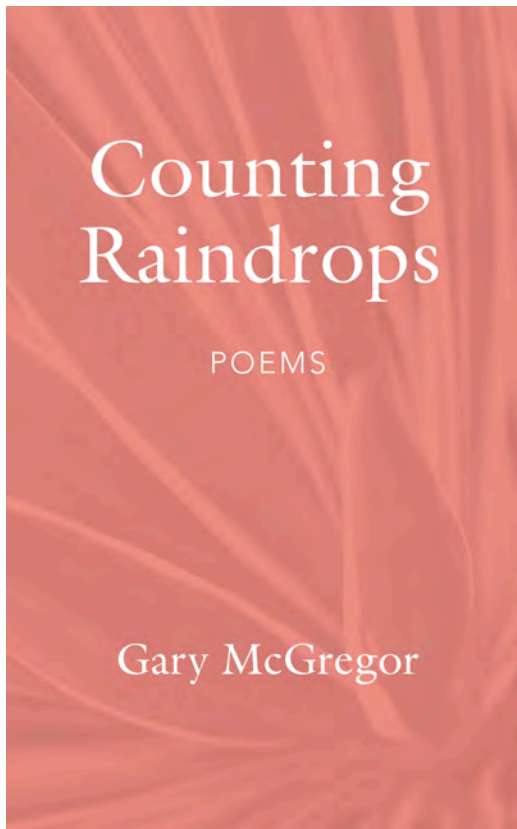
THE PASTURE

Pink rabbit clouds chase
each other across a late
afternoon sky, a solitary
tree casts a long shadow
over the fields piercing
two fences in its fall.

A bucket you might call
a pail swings in my hand.
Grazing cows stand out
like cardboard cutouts
against a distant tree line.

They lift their heads in
unison to follow me with
great brown bovine eyes.
I suspect they wonder
why I transgress this
pasture they call home.

Unknowing, of course,
that on the other side
of the farthest fence
is a lush prolific patch
of the best blackberries
you have ever tasted.



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