

CHOOSE PEACHES



Poems by

LINCOLN HARTFORD

CHOOSE PEACHES may be read online at
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INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

I intend that the reader be able to read each poem, independently, dropping in and out of the volume as he or she pleases. It is also possible to read these poems in the sequence of a story line that belongs both to the author and the reader. We all live in the context of the movement of seasons. All of us seek and need a place, a profound belonging on this earth, and that belonging is not just about geography, but about people. Cheers. (LH)



**For Jan
who sings the songs
on the webpage
and still enjoys
fresh
warm
peach
pie**

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EPILOGUE

BACK COVER

No Other Pie

*The poems are numbered, not the pages.

I SEASONS



*seasons of our heart
call new poems from our eyes
poem #3*

THE BEGINNING

our day begins
 like feathers in your hand
shaded in grey
 promise unknown

presented
 without blemish
 even of breath

a touch

this moment

SHAKE A BAG OF PROMISES

and out tumble hopes and dreams,
a bag of doughnuts, and out
roll sweet round things
you can put your tongue through,
not unlike promises.

Shake a bag of marbles
and out spills
a game that you can play.
But shake a bag of memories,
and out skip the words
and rhythm of poetry.

KNOWING

disorder clouds my head
thoughts dart past one another
showing no respect

thinking is natural
knowing is something else

NEW POEMS

trees stand upright
in quiet speckled snow deer pause
and enter shrine

seasons of our heart
call new poems from our eyes



WHITE ON WHITE

the weather is a painter using
white on white
white on background white on foreground
white upon white
white on the roof
white up and over the low-lying shrubs
a thick blanket for the grass
a playground for rabbits
snow like a scarf
around the neck of newly-planted trees
and on branches before the wind comes
there is snow
cradled by needles



DID WE SURVIVE YET?

Walk with Gwennie
along ice-clogged, grey-shrouded lakefront.

Ask yourself how the intrepid ones
will remove their fishing shacks
dotting the sea of slush.

Watch front yard for signs,
daffodil spikes seeking sun.

Remove parkas
from closet winter-stuffed.

Load flower camera,
ready for first yellow bloom.

Parade with Jan quilt-covered
in creaking wheelchair
into April's silver sun.



GOODBYE WINTER

The winter ends, and it is time
to face another way. Our rhyme
reversed, I plant the first row
of onions in earth's cold and renew
the garden that will be won.

I laugh at the strengthening sun
to see all earth's green fountains bubble
and the sad works of darkness crumble.

You do not speak, but I do not grieve
that now at last you take your leave.
The pleasure is mine to see you go.

I open the earth where there was snow
and release what you kept in your dark hold.
"New life" says the sun (he shines pure gold).
To the frost line and below you recede
to plot next winter's cold deed.

RUFOUS-SIDED TOWHEE

(in waltz time)

O grass-hopping towhee, black brown and white,
you grace our world with mealtime delight.

Your serrated song is edged for flight
for love it's true.

I pray your safety through the night
'til morning's due.

You are among the feathered bunch
that pokes and prods the lawn for lunch.

I put out seed 'cause I have a hunch
that bugs aren't all
your gullet can hold, your beak can crunch.
"Towhee", I call.

Aha! You claim a ground-feeding game;
I see you fly to feeder through rain.
At first you look around the grain,
turn tail and squawk,
the sound I'm sure of towhee disdain.
Can towhees mock?

So now at end of summer's day,
I watch for you to come this way
for one last bit of bug or stray
seed from above,
then flit obscure to join night's grey,
and earth's cold love.



RAIN DANCE

Birds sit on the line
during soft summer rain.
Surrounded by wet
without a cheep complaint,
birds sit on the line
in the rain.
I have pictures to prove that
birds sit all day
in the rain.



I walk in the rain,
not to get wet,
but to be surrounded
by the wet.

Mickey the dog
walks me in the rain, though
she does more. She
dances in the rain,
 bounds in the rain,
 barks loud
in the rain.

Rain spatters
the surface of the shimmering lake.
In the forest, new trees rise fresh
with cheers from the gracious rain.

NO ONE STOPS THE RAIN, Summer 2003

Rain comes, and then keeps coming.
We who live on the Lemonweir River
watch it like our favorite tv show.

The little green tree-clogged river
becomes a brown torrent,
clogged no more.

Muddy water floods our yards and gardens.
Horror tears our eyes
like rain pelting the Lemonweir.

Though never god-fearing before,
we plead, "God help us."
But the rain, the rain keeps coming.

NO OTHER PIE

First choose peaches
when to touch
is to bruise them,
when their essence rises
before you lift a knife.
Choose them because their color
makes you weep.
Choose them from trees of people
who have names, who go home after work.

Prepare crust
using shortening, vinegar and egg.
Drink peach wine as you toil.
Dab scent of peach on table cloth.
Carefully slice peaches
leaving tender skin attached.
Add sugar,
freshly ground nutmeg,
corn starch stirred into water,
and one thing more:
dribble over the mixture,
a few sensuous drops
of almond extract.

Bake 45 minutes or perhaps 50,
until the crust is, as they say,
golden.

Light candles;
as you serve,
play Second Movement of Beethoven's "Seventh".

Don't speak.

COLORS OF A SUNSET

Grand and faithful globe,
orange, shading into gold, into daffodil yellow, into peach:
we gather to watch your nightly disappearing act.

You reflect on rippled water's thin surface
where tonight, peach is your featured hue.
Peach laps to far shore, spills into forest green,
which stands erect, waiting, reaching for lavender sky.

In the dark distance, another artist paints,
in excrement brown, blood red, and refuse green.
Black freight trains roar through the frightened blue night,
loaded with bombs, bullets and beautiful sunlit bodies.





AUTUMN SUN

(Andrew Wyeth, AUTUMN, 1984, watercolor,
from the HELGA SUITE)

If Autumn Sun had not shone
on Andrew Wyeth's golden Helga...

If Autumn Sun had not shown
the aged, gnarled tree
giving young Helga rest...

If Autumn Sun had not known
to shine the burnt orange hillside
filling Helga's gaze...

If the shining Autumn Sun
had not given shadowed witness
spilling like dark ink...

If Autumn Sun had not shone
and warmed earth's bright page
before it turned...

Oh, Winter, you desolate charmer,
we see through you
and your Doomsday delusion.

COME SLEEP

Mud-splattered yellow canoe
glides through November morning.
Mist, heavy with silence,
shrouds grey-green slough
where iridescent mallards
raised their floating families
under a mothering sun.
North Wind waits while
Nature crawls inside herself.
When she is ready
he will cover his bride
with a thick quilt
of December snow.

II WHERE I BELONG



Where I Belong
poem #19

FIERY FURNACE

In the town
where I survived my youth,
Halloween was not for fun.
Primary terror for the night
was to block the only road
into the village.
It connected Hillsville
to US Route 224, and
to the lonesome Catholic Church
towering over the rusty water
of the Mahoning River.

Just where this “Road to Hillsville”
bent to enter the center of town,
a laughing gang of teen-age boys
erected a barrier of corn shocks,
dragged from a field nearby.
As we watched from our back porch
the youthful terrorists
poured oil and gasoline
on these autumnal bystanders.
I still see our road exploding
with flames and primal screams
in the darkness
of my Hillsville Halloween.

CICADA’S SONG

When days were young
and nights were long
I sang cicada’s song.

“August!” big folks said
with hint of dread,
but I sang cicada’s song.

“School,” Mother announced
as if her word could stop
the singing of cicada’s song.

Not even winter’s blanket
could cover memory’s rehearsal
of the ballad called cicada’s song.

MARRIAGE IS NOT FOR EVERYONE

They were Mutt and Jeff,
yin and yang,
hand and foot,
two roads diverging
yellow and red
in the same wood.

Didn't know how to fight.
Jokes didn't rhyme;
clocks didn't keep
the same time.

She was tough;
 he loved to laugh.
She taught math;
 he sang songs.
She knew passion;
 he did crossword puzzles.

People so bound,
"other"
was a foreign concept.

How did it begin?
What made it work?
Ask them,
and Dad would wink and nod.
Mother would count the years
and answer,
"Your Daddy says..."

MY FATHER'S WATCH

My father kept his watch in his pocket.
He would feel the coins
and finger the cold gold back of time,
draw it to light and study its face
as one would a storied photograph,
listening to the hours.
Now in similar silence
we study his face,
listening to the hours.



CLASS REUNION

Fifty years later,
she's still married
to Joe Bender, chief jock,

and as gently beautiful
as when she arrived
on the bus from New Wilmington,
the mysterious farm country
beyond the Mahoning River.

We've been friends all this time.
I yet ache to dance with her.

WHERE I BELONG

I know about tumbling streams
that wash stone and clay,
feet and soul.
I remember rough-faced limestone

outcropped from receding soil,
fit for boys to climb
and dive from
into icewater.

Streams, limestone-studded hills,
are distant memories
that drive my wandering life.
I flee the placid plain

and climb rough places
not to re-create lost time,
but to keep company with my
Pennsylvania feet and soul.

“NO PLACE LIKE HOME”

What you have to do
is hold hands with someone
and sit a spell
and say,
“This here’s home,
here’s our place,
here’s where we belong.”
And then you sing,
“Oh there’s no place like home.”

But what we mean is
“There’s no one like you
and where you are --
that’s home.”

All the photos and poetry
about our places
are about you

WHY HE WAKES EARLY

He can resist an alarm clock.
He often turns from rays of the sun
slipping through slats of the shade.
He can even dream away
from responsibility.

But at 6 a.m., daylight savings or
central standard, dependable Gwennie,
clicks over wood floor
from her room to his,
slowing as she nears.
She pads with cat’s feet
over his rug ‘til she sits
beside his slumbered frame.

Always the dramatic pause
until she places her stubby legs
on the bed just where his hand
can reach her head
for her first pat of the day.



LIGHTS OUT

(sotto voce)...it's time...sun's gone...
ah...the stylish young cardinal...
dressed in gray feather coat with pink trim...
drops like a rock for one last drink...
gone like a shot...

here comes the robin....first to rise, last to retire...there...
below the bath....he likes to work from the
ground up...hop, hop, up on top....good night robin....
be quiet when you get up...

the squirrel below the feeder...watch.. there's the flick
of the tail...hard to see in this half-light...scavenging seeds
the jay dropped.....you hear that...there it is again...
daddy cardinal...two long scoops and a bunch of short chirps,
“come home now...come home now...
time for bed, time for bed, time for bed”...

look out....*zoom* goes the metallic green bomber...
into and out of the bee balm....boy you just sit here... and wait...
and they all come...what a show....

and for our last act....the lady grosbeak...
no....dumble bumble bee still working the flowers...
bingo....lights out....all gone....
time for bed...me too...

PRAYER

In my smiling house
darkness holds me
in the comfort
of her spacious womb.

I work and read
so as not to miss
the ghosts
who claim my night.

Gifts from the stars,
memories
show me
my people.

In the time before sleep
I hold these holy ones
to the light.

III ABOUT YOU



*All the photos and poetry
about our places
are about you.
poem #20*

love dance

hand in hand
across the bridge
drawn by sound
of music to dance by

mexican restaurant
featuring a dj
spinning songs from the patio
overlooking the handsome river

margaritas and moonlight

we sweep onto the floor
waltzing one beat
to the measure

giddy

with the laughter
of our flying feet

LOVE JUST BEGUN: an idyll

Now that I have you in my bed
Would you mind if my hand
found your blessed bosom
and my lips kissed yours?

And if perchance
that were allowed,
then might my hand
gently
find that other place?

An idyll,
just an idyll.
She needn't fear
that I will sacrifice our gain
for one tempting moment's stain
on the trust
that from this day begins.

How the winds of fancy
play with heart and mind
of people adrift
on the sea of uncertainty.

A MAN AND THE MOON

Cool mother moon,
mirror to lost lovers,
drop-in cafe for lost children,
you are beyond me.

I stare at your wont,
gaze at your aura,
reach for your sky turn.
I don't know you.

Women I love
live in your rhythm.
They moon over you.
I write their songs.

HAVE YOU EVER

Have you ever seen
a short-legged dog
pulling a man
guiding a wheelchair
with a woman in it
downhill
in an Arizona State Park?

Have you ever seen
a man
pulling a short-legged dog
while pushing a woman
in a wheelchair
uphill
in an Arizona State Park?

The woman and the man
both laughed
to see such things.
The short-legged dog
barked to their tune.

MY JAN LAUGHED

We are at peace
sitting in her room
waiting for supper,
listening to the song
“Shenandoah”.

I tell her we
have been together
a long, long, long time.
She smiles at
the sliver of thought.

Hand to mouth,
palm to the wind,
fingers curved gracefully,
head tilted back,
she wants to sing,

“Oh Shenandoah,
I long to see you.”
A shaking tone
finds its way.
She smiles.

Now she talks
to the brother in her mind.
“Jerry, don’t do that”, she says.

Time for supper;
I’ll feed her by a bright window,
and afterward, as is our custom,
we’ll have a ride in the park
by the speedy little river
where children play and swim.

Once we parked her wheelchair
beside the river
and the wind came
and washed us.

Up the hill,
by the highway,
a woodchuck played,
and I shouted,
“Don’t go near the traffic.”

My Jan laughed.

HER GIFT

When she was young, other children
thought she was as they were,
a winner, or a loser,
but she had different wiring.
A taunt, push, even a shove,
seemed not to work.
Her response avoided embarrassment.
“Are you ok?” she would ask,
as though they were the ones
knocked off balance.

Like other people,
she grew up, married and had children,
and worked at her profession.
There was about her a calm
that offered sweet peace
to harried young mothers.
Small communities formed around her.

Dutifully, they would select
a parenting book to study together.
Rampant laughter seemed more characteristic.
She called them
her Eat and Giggle groups.



WHEN LOVE IS LOST

If only I could reach you through the haze
that clings to you like moss on southern oak.
I call your name and you reply amazed.
You laugh as though this were a clever joke,
though we did laugh as one, and cried the same.
How fate has turned the love we early made
to demon's work, that makes it all a game.
Cold hope, hot rage join hands. Sweet love, you fade.

And is a happy ending in the cards
when there is no way back to paradise?
Pretend that dying doesn't matter? Farce!
Truth is, this end has no good news, no mice
to carry joy's report to all the town.
When love is lost, its song is grief's long moan.



CUP OF KINDNESS

I held you
as I held our babies:
left hand at the top of your back,
right cradling the small.

I pressed you to me,
not tight,
but so close your warmth
entered my heart.

When it was time
we unfolded ourselves
carefully
like handling good china.

We did not break,
but disease broke you.
Love mingled with blood
and tears, but could not stop

our enemy's work.
What good is love
if it cannot warn us
of the poison in the cup?

Foolish anger.
Consider our loss
if I never had held you,
never sipped your tea.

MY BLUE SHIRT

It was the year that blue discovered tan,
so she bought me this blousy blue shirt,
plus a pair of tan slacks; she said
they would give my frame
“some grace.”

Ten years now.
I still wear the outfit.
She likes it on me-
whom-she-doesn't-quite-recognize.
Standing before her wheelchair I ask,
“Do you like my blue shirt?”
She answers, “Ye-es!”
“And do you like me?”
From behind the door, she says, “yes.”

Sometimes, a shirt, faded,
washed a hundred times,
lasts longer than one's mind.
Sometimes a common shirt
fits like a gold ring.

SOLACE

In the midst of ourselves
laughing into tears
crying for sadness' sake
singing with heart beating the notes

a voice more quiet than sleep
speaks of life
given in full measure
in a time and place
not of our choosing.



PLANS

I plan to walk to another place,
down life's hill, past ripe pastures.
Fences will stare at my footsteps;
gates will question my route.

I will hear no goodbye;
the world will not greet me.
There is a land far from here
where I'll live for a time.

I plan to walk to another place,
down life's hill, past ripe pastures.

EPILOGUE

The lake, still shining,
long after the sun
has gone from view,

with us left
wandering
from shore to shore,

unable to find anyone
who knows us,
our own little lights,
flickering.

How does the story end?
Does he wander
in his little boat
endlessly

until his lonely light fades,
or will the lake
share its shining secret?



Lincoln Hartford lives on a lake in central Wisconsin, where he and his Welsh corgi watch the seasons move life on this precious earth. There he writes, sings, and records the days in photographs. Dr. Hartford served with the United Methodist Church for 35 years. His ministries included pastorates in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Iowa, New Mexico and Wales. He especially enjoyed campus ministry work, university teaching, and chaplaincy at the Navajo Preparatory Academy in Farmington New Mexico. His wife Jan served as Director of Music at most of the churches he served, and worked at the Navajo Academy as the Music Teacher. They toured much of Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and New Mexico, with a two-person musical show called “Life ‘n Stuff”. In addition to writing poetry Hartford has written several plays, and a musical, “Wisconsin Tapestry”. Dr. Hartford holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in music, and a master’s and doctorate in theology. His academic specialty is the hymn writing and singing of Wales. He has written extensively on that subject, and along with his wife Jan, has performed widely in the genre of Welsh hymns and folk music. In retirement, he serves the Presbyterian Church of Mauston as its Minister of Music. This is his first book of poetry.

NO OTHER PIE

*First choose peaches
when to touch
is to bruise them,
when their essence rises
before you lift a knife.
Choose them because their color
makes you weep.
Choose them from trees of people
who have names,
who go home after work.*



*Prepare crust
using shortening, vinegar and egg.
Drink peach wine as you toil.
Dab scent of peach on table cloth.
Carefully slice peaches
leaving tender skin attached.
Add sugar,
freshly ground nutmeg,
corn starch stirred into water,
and one thing more:
dribble over the mixture,
a few sensuous drops
of almond extract.*



*Bake 45 minutes or perhaps 50,
until the crust is, as they say,
golden.*

*Light candles;
as you serve,
play Second Movement of Beethoven's "Seventh".*

Don't speak.