

## *Ellen*

Ellen was my first love, a long time ago.  
I lost her then, why or how I do not know.  
We grew up and lost touch with each other;  
She became another's wife and a mother.

I finally settled down and raised a family,  
Built myself a career and, I cannot deny,  
I let my marriage die, that was a shame.  
But then I was unwise, and I was to blame.

Then one Spring day, much to my surprise,  
Came another Ellen, one day at moonrise.  
She was not the like the first Ellen, not her.  
The first was serene; this one passion and fire.

But one day, for no reason, rash words flew.  
She was angry, hurt, upset, and I knew,  
That once again a beloved Ellen I had lost,  
And once more I knew how great the cost.

So here I am, sad, tired, living all alone.  
I was selfish, cold, with a heart of stone.  
Not at all the man I should have been,  
But I wasn't, I was foolish, rash, and mean.

Often, late at night, in the dark and quiet  
I often wonder if Ellen thinks of me yet,  
But for all my musings, all said and done,  
I know that my Ellen is gone, gone, gone.

- *Ellen* © Leonard Yarbrough, 1996

## **Chiaroscuro**

When I am all alone, and I have nobody, no one at all,  
There is a dark clarity in wanting to be freed of my shell  
And from knowing everything is ordained to be dismal,  
Can't someone out there hear me when I cry, when I call?  
Is there someone to aid me, comfort me, hold me, free me  
From this melancholy that binds me close, keeps me unfree.  
The world is dim, dark, and I am fearful, seeking release,  
Praying for courage, and for a faith that will not cease.

- *Chiaroscuro*, © Leonard Yarbrough, 1997

## Kaleidoscope

Look out there, my friend, tell me what do you see?  
See the sparkling jewels there, don't they look like you and me,  
Beckoning, sparkling, forming lovely patterns along the way?  
You can see them early in the morning dew or late in the day.  
I never saw them before, for I was blind, confused, and in a daze,  
Then a very wise man once said to me, you think life is just a haze.  
But it's not, you've lost your focus, forgot who you are, what you be.  
Look around, there's nothing to do, call yourself forth, you're free.  
And I saw, I saw that he was right. We are each one a jewel, a gift  
To be polished, burnished, until we shine with our own inner light.  
Which we do, as a kaleidoscope, shining and ever changing.  
Take heart, smile and remember life is given for living, loving,  
Caring, sharing, and perhaps more. I cannot be certain of more  
Than this, I once thought I knew, and thought that life was a bore.  
I erred in my thinking, for I now know that life is not about me or you.  
Instead, life is about how we can attain grace as we do what we do;  
It is a gift, and when my spirit is low, I take time to look out there.  
There are jewels around, out in the sun, lying there, everywhere.

*-Kaleidoscope*, © Leonard Yarbrough, 1997

## *The Engineer*

A shy, quiet man is he, although he can be loud and boisterous,  
No stranger to the arcane magic that others view as mysterious,  
That stuff we call science and mathematics and other such things  
That we cannot fathom, even if we accept what each of them brings.

He is not so good being with others unless they be such as he -  
Perhaps it is because he imagines things others of us cannot see -  
Or maybe it is because deep down he considers us all beneath him.  
I don't know, nor do I care, for he is after all a modern jinn.

Bridges, buildings, marvelous tools, toys, even an airplane -  
He conceives, designs, builds, tests, and perhaps builds again.  
Striving for perfection, failure is but a nuisance to be pulled apart,  
As he painstakingly creates for us the benefits of his arcane art.

I once dreamed of being like him, for I wanted to be able to know  
All the things that I thought that such a man as he must show  
Mastery over, and the ways of controlling those mysterious forces  
That gives him such power, and I wanted control over those sources.

Now I too am an engineer, and I have become what I dreamed to be.  
I, too, am quiet, for I realize now the responsibility given to me.  
Should I fail to do my craft well, be careless, omit a small detail, then  
Others could be harmed, or die, and this is the engineer's greatest sin.

-- *The Engineer* © Leonard Yarbrough, 1996

## *Val-de-rei*

I do not know where I will go, but this I do know -  
I'll venture with a song in my heart, a smile on my face,  
Taking time to look and to muse, to think a bit; and so  
I'll go see the world, hoping to make it a better place.

There is so much to be gained in being a true friend.  
I am fortunate that I can be and that I do all that I can.  
Lending a hand, being a man upon whom others depend.  
And when my life is done, they can say, "There went a man."

No, I don't want riches or costly possessions or even fame,  
These are not why I travel, seldom lingering, on the go.  
Life is a grand adventure, a joy, a mystery, and only a game  
That I play, whatever its purpose, perhaps I'll never know.

Once I believed I couldn't make a difference in the world.  
Once I was steeped in self-pity, despair, to my great shame.  
Then someone, I never knew his name, a vision unfurled,  
Showed me that it's my life to live, no one else is to blame.

No one else, for only I can account for each deed and word  
And for each sin, too, for I have not always been my best,  
As I have gone on and when I forgot my goal and erred.  
So I'll move on, seeking, wondering, until finally I rest.

- *Val-de-rei*, © Leonard Yarbrough, 1996

## What is a Man?

One day as I was working all alone on some old thing in my shop  
My son came running by, and all at once he came to a stop.  
He watched me at work for awhile, and then he raised his hand.  
And then he spoke to me, asking, Father, just what is a man?  
I'm a small boy, I do not understand what it means or what I am  
Tell me truly, will I grow up to be a man or must I always be small?  
O, Father, I do not know, please can you tell me anything at all?

I was taken aback, for this was a question I hadn't expected  
Not then, not for many years, and I had not all expected  
This question from my son, and yet I knew I must say to him  
Something he could hold and know, nothing said at a whim.  
But what is a man? I had pondered that question myself often  
And to little avail, for though I thought much, I still didn't know.  
And I looked at my son, standing there, waiting to hear what's so.

My son, I'll tell you truly, I don't know if I know what is a man.  
But sit you down here by me, and I'll tell you what little that I can.  
Man is like the acorn from the mighty tree, at first little and looking  
Not much like what he will become, but if he keeps on trying  
And praying and doing good, righting wrongs, and helping others,  
Then, as he grows and learns about the world, some way, some day  
He'll know that, whatever else he may have been, he has become a man.

- *What is a Man?* © Leonard Yarbrough, 1997

## Cosmic Joke

Adam, my man, God is my name;  
You and Creation are my game.  
I'm finished with you; but you get no rest.  
Your life is no more than a simple jest.

Oh, you think I'm not being serious.  
Now I really do find that to be curious.  
You don't agree I'm proper, you say?  
But I gave you the sun, night and day.

And more, too, such as right and wrong;  
A sense of beauty, an ear for a song;  
A need to work and to do evil and good,  
And free will, too. I wonder if I should.

Well, I know you are able to handle this.  
If not, then there's nothing you'll miss.  
What, you believe I'm trying to deceive?  
That's just like man, so I'll give you Eve.

Oh, she'll keep you quite busy, and by chance  
If you need more to do, why tend to my plants.  
Watch over the animals, too; they need care  
But don't overdo it, or they'll be everywhere.

What, you still ask more about your role?  
Little fool, it's very plain to see - you're whole,  
The world is yours, I've made no mistake.  
Oh, one more thing. Ignore the snake.

- *Cosmic Joke*, © Leonard Yarbrough, 1997

## **Paeon**

It is on this occasion that I offer  
To pay tribute to the things I admire  
And honor and respect with all my might.  
There are several such things, you know,  
And I hardly know which first to cite.

First, I must acknowledge my parents  
Who formed me out of their love  
One for the other and gave me life.  
It wasn't an easy thing for them. to do  
Then in those years before the great Strife.

Yet they did and for my sister and I  
There was always plenty of love  
And a roof above and food for all.  
They gave to us the zest of scholarship  
And the pride to stand alone, and tall.

Then, there were my teachers, who  
Never complained about my abilities  
They just allowed me to grow and study.  
And they offered a means to reach my goals.  
When I failed, they were still there for me.

Always encouraging, seldom disparaging  
Always available for consultation and help.  
I never thanked them before; this I regret,  
But I now say to ail that are here to hear,  
These are true heroes, who I'll never forget.

I had a wife once, and I caused her much grief  
And I allowed that grief to consume me until  
I had only anger and bitterness, sick in my heart.  
Yet she loved me, as I had loved her, and now  
I know that she was stronger; she let me part.

She taught our children so very well the things  
That she had been taught, the sparkle of dew  
In the morning, the beauty of the hummingbird  
And the joy of a rainbow and the sunset's glory.  
These things she did so well, with a loving word.



My country stands for liberty and opportunity  
And it has given me much, asking in return  
So very little, it seems, and yet all around me  
I read and bear of what is wrong and not working  
But look at what we have and the way we can be.

I do not understand why we must always disagree  
When we are all but simple beings on the same  
Journey through life. I know that this also lends  
A zest to living, so even not understanding, I give  
Thanks for all those who their diverse ways attend.

So I give these words of thanksgiving and praise  
For I'm truly thankful for the things I've done  
Able to go and see all the places I've seen and  
For the places I will yet see and the things that I've  
Yet to do and the deeds that still await my hand.

*- Paean, © Leonard Yarbrough, 1997*

## The Watcher

I saw a very sad thing today.  
A child was all alone at play.  
He wanted a friend, don't you see?  
But, he had none, there was only me.

I saw a cruel act yesterday.  
The children had a cat at bay.  
The cat was old, tired, forlorn.  
They killed him that early morn.

I saw a wonderful scene the other day.  
It was just at nine, near an old causeway.  
I looked up, a falling star lit the sky.  
Oh, it was so bright, and away up high.

I saw a sight the other day in town.  
I couldn't believe it; I had to sit down.  
Two cops, all dressed in dark blue,  
Arrested two skate boarders just the two.

I saw a grown man cry the other day.  
His wife had just died, what can I say?  
His children were grown and far away.  
Now he is all alone and can not pray.

I watched an angry man for a while.  
We knew no joy and would not smile.  
I watched him, for he seemed so proud.  
Yet he was alone there in the crowd.

I stopped by a small garden nearby.  
Oh, the lovely flowers, I had to cry  
Tears of joy at this beautiful sight.  
A garden is truly God's greatest delight.

I saw couple in love not so long ago.  
They were wrapped up in each other so.  
I wondered if their love would last or not.  
It's a precious thing; it's all they've got.

I listened to a fearful old man preach  
Against earthly pleasures; he should teach  
Us to enjoy what little we have. Instead,  
He'd rather have his flock be very afraid.

I came across a class there in the park.  
To the youngsters it seemed just a lark.  
Then, I watched the teacher, a young man  
Who tried to teach, but his class just ran.

I saw an old black man down by the street.  
He seemed to be tired, in his face was defeat.  
Then, all at once, a young girl came to his aid,  
Took his hand, and bought him lemonade.

I watched you all while I was out walking.  
You were all so busy, and all were talking  
About this and that; I wonder if you know  
How much you say and how little is so.

I pondered all these things I hav seen.  
The world is as we make it, or as mean  
Or as grand as we want. We get to say  
How it will be as we live day by day.

- *The Watcher*, © Leonard Yarbrough, 1997

## *My Lady*

I have a lady ever so wondrously fair;  
Lovely, full of life, with light brown hair  
Never a cross word with me, e'en though  
I sometimes roam, she knows I love her so.

She's full of life and joy, a perfect mate.  
I don't know why she allowed me to date  
Her when she could have her pick of men.  
No matter, she let me think I chose her then.

Sweet lips, oh, so sweet, and when I hold her  
I am content, for there is nothing else I'd rather  
Do than lie there with her, watching her abed,  
Talking, loving, as if we were newly wed.

We have some very intimate words we use.  
Perhaps we shouldn't, but when we fuse  
As one in passion embraced, it's heaven,  
And we two thankful for the love we're given.

Oh, she loves me, this I truly know to be so,  
And I love her truly, this we both do know.  
Yes, I miss her for we are often parted.  
'Tis necessary, for our lives are so charted.

My lady comes to me when I cannot be  
with her, for I think she wants to be with me  
As much as I want to be with her, perhaps more.  
Those moments are precious, like none before.

A career woman is she, with great responsibility,  
For she is determined to create with her ability  
As much as I am, doing the things that I must do,  
And yet, at the end of the day, we miss each so.

I am quite lucky to have my very own, special lady.  
And she is special, and loving, and lovely to see.  
I take her, she takes me, she is so passionate  
For me, with me. She is my lady, my love, my mate.

- *My Lady*, © Leonard Yarbrough, 1997

## *Wandering*

I've sailed the seven seas, a long time ago,  
And slept under the Southern Cross many times  
I've gone into dark jungles and over high sierras  
Walked by raging rivers and along dusty trails.  
There's always another place that I haven't seen  
And when I'm tired of where I am, I'll move on along,  
Seeking, searching, I do not know for what or even why.  
Someday, perhaps I'll grow tired of traveling on;  
Someday, perhaps I'll find a place that I like  
Enough to want to stay at and put down my roots  
But until I do, I'll keep traveling on, looking for  
Another place that I haven't yet been.

- *Wandering*, © Leonard Yarbrough, 1997

## Hezekiah

Hezekiah was the son of a slave who was the son of a slave.  
Nevertheless, he was a good man, kind, generous, and brave.  
And he always did his best, no matter what he was tasked to do.  
I knew him when I was a lad, he was a good friend, this I know.  
When he was an old man, the master gave him his liberty.  
And now he was set free, a marvelous thing, don't you agree?  
Hezekiah had never asked for that, it was not a thing he desired.  
And so, at the age of sixty-three, Hezekiah laid down and died.  
Why did he die, you ask? Well, I cannot say, I don't know.  
Someone thought he was doing what good he should, so  
The act was done, but the thing that strikes me as odd  
Is that no one thought to ask Hezekiah if they should.

- *Hezekiah*, © Leonard Yarbrough, 1997

## *Good Ole Boys*

Pickup truck, rusty jeep, California Dooley, Harley hawg -  
Big wheels, open glass, old engines, and an old hound dog,  
Engine revs, a high whine, a roar, the squeal of rubber  
On the pavement, the stink of oil, stale beer, lye soap,  
Along with the sweet smell of sweat and Colorado dope.

Look at them, outside a crude roadside beer hall  
Swapping stories, lying, drinking Bud by the pint  
Like possums in a garbage can, they've no sense at all.  
Now a bet on one or the other, fistful of money in an old can  
Held by the runt, they don't consider him a man.

Now they're off, right down a two lane road, loud and free  
Side by side, no thought of what to do if there happens to be  
Someone who decides to come down that road at the same time  
That they are racing so carelessly, for the race is the great lure.  
What the hell! They've done it before, maybe again, for sure,

Uh oh. A tire blows, one swerves into the other - blam!  
Squeal of metal on metal, loud cry of pain, "Oh, damn!"  
All come running - what's happened there at the bend.  
The big pickup's in a culvert, the other smashed in a tree  
O Lord! - the driver's dead, and the runt just looks at me.

- *Good Ole Boys*, © Leonard Yarbrough, 1997

## *The Scout*

He's seen the Southern Cross in the dark of night.  
And he has sailed the Straits of Magellan, too  
He's walked the far plains of Pamplona  
And trekked across the Russian Steppes.  
He climbed to the top of the Southern Alps  
As well as the mighty Kilimanjaro.  
He's lain under the far northern stars  
But always alone, always so very much alone.

- *The Scout*, © Leonard Yarbrough, 1998



## *Politically Correct*

I want to be sure that I've got this right.  
If I haven't, I'll be in trouble with my peers.  
What am I prating about, so late at night?  
About what is right, not what is so, Oh my,  
I must have drunk far too many beers.

It is a serious matter, however, being correct.  
We cannot allow the existence of being wrong.  
At least so say my colleagues, all who expect  
That we all should agree, even if we don't know  
What is so, we all must agree, in order to belong.

Why do I have to agree, in order to belong?  
Oh, that's easy, for you see we must agree.  
If we do not, that means we must accommodate  
A divergence of thought, even that someone else  
Could be right. Can't you see, we must always agree.

The Church split Itself over this issue, you know.  
So have nations, and tribes, and other groups.  
It does no good to say, wait, enough, let's just  
Get along with each other, be kind, and not want  
To be right or have others be wrong, this doesn't work.

I offered this, mostly in jest, the other day, to my peers.  
My goodness, what a fright it was for them to have to think  
That there might be another thought, or idea, or opinion  
That was not agreed upon, for after all, we are the ones  
Who have to determine what is correct, not what is right.

Politically correct is well and good, I suppose, for it seems  
That it keeps us all from having to think long and hard  
About what really matters, and what really does not.  
And, too, I'm sure, we may all be concerned that what  
We think is right, is not, after all's said and done. Oh me!

- *Politically Correct*, © Leonard Yarbrough, 1997

## My Home Town

When I was growing up  
I wanted to travel far away  
From my home town.  
It was only a small place  
And I thought it was  
Not where I would be found.

So when I finished school  
I made it a point to get away.  
I traveled far, to distant shores  
And I thought I was living  
The good life and doing well  
While I was making my scores.

Oh, I saw many things, and  
I accomplished many deeds  
As well. But one day while  
Drinking at a small bar  
The errant thought appeared  
That I could no longer smile.

What was this? I was happy,  
Or so I thought, but what  
was the meaning to what I  
was now doing? Was that  
How would I be remembered?  
So, in that bar, I began to cry.

So I sought many wise men  
Who were no help, for when  
I asked what must I do?  
They all said the same words,  
Or so it seemed; which were:  
Your life is not about you.

I pondered these words at last,  
And finally I began to understand  
That perhaps I had been wrong;  
That I had things all backwards.  
And so I began another journey  
To my home town, where I belong.

- *My Home Town* © Leonard Yarbrough, 1998

## *Each Day*

I promise that I will  
Pick up after myself;  
Improve my world;  
Forget my miseries;  
Help someone;  
Speak truly;  
Act from integrity;  
Smell the flowers;  
Watch the sunset;  
Listen for the wizards;  
Make a new friend;  
Write an old friend;  
Forgive an enemy;  
Love everyone;  
And drink only good  
whiskey and fine wine.

- *Each Day*, © Leonard Yarbrough, 1997

## The Provost

One has to be an academic  
In order to know of the post  
That belongs to the person  
Who is the college provost.  
Of all the curious positions,  
It isn't one that to me beckons.  
It more like that of a farmer who  
Wishes to herd a flock of chickens.

He is the leader of a faculty  
Composed of many self-deceivers,  
Composed of a diverse bunch,  
A rag-tag group of non-believers  
In the wily provost's ability  
To lead and guide, and to teach  
Them as faculty, his only duty.  
And so, he stays out of reach.

Still, the Provost must stand  
For what the college stands.  
For, if he doesn't do this thing  
Then we faculty tie his hands  
With querulous quarrels and spats.  
Like chickens we'll fly over the fence  
In the name of academic freedom  
Never bothering to make sense.

The Provost believes he can depend  
Upon his considerable power, when  
In fact, he has very little power.  
All he can do is stay and tend  
The academic garden, mostly forlorn

For we faculty will proceed to go  
Blithely ahead and do whatever  
We wish to do and do it just so.

The curious thing is, that each of us  
Will work along an individual way.  
And later in the term when we stop  
To see how well we say our say  
We find, much to our surprise, that  
What has happened looks like chance;  
It isn't proper, nor fit, but it seems  
To be a version of a very crazy dance.

The provost knows this, of course.  
That is why he is so often flustered  
His faculty really hasn't a clue -  
They are after all sequestered  
From reality, and, let's face it  
If herding chickens is a fine art,  
Herding a faculty is much more so.  
Still, I'm glad it's not my part

So here's to that fussy old man  
The provost, long may he pretend  
That he really does lead his merry  
Band of faculty, it's no great sin.  
Let him have his academic toys and  
All those inscrutable processes and norms.  
In spite of often being at cross-purposes  
We do, after all, fill in his damned forms.

- *The Provost*, © Leonard Yarbrough, 1998

## *My Angel*

I have an angel, you know;  
She watches as I come and go.  
Sometimes she smiles at me and  
Perhaps then I can understand  
For I'm not always good, you see.  
But that's why she watches me.

We all need our angels to tend.  
If not, I think that we would bend  
From the struggle to live and love.  
My angel is always there above;  
If not her, then her sisters are  
There instead, and they too care.

How many angels are there?  
A very great number, somewhere  
And one is always there for me;  
Giving me the strength to be  
As I should be, faithful and strong,  
And, perhaps, to right a wrong.

So look for your angel today.  
She's out there, this I can say  
If you only would allow her  
To watch over and protect you.  
And if you trip, she'll be there  
To lend a hand and wipe a tear.

- *My Angel* © Leonard Yarbrough, 1998

## *Blind Man's Walk*

Tap, tap, tap the sound made by the cane  
Tap, tap, tap pecking slowly down the way  
Tap, tap, tap making an endless refrain  
Tap, tap, tap tomorrow, today, yesterday.

I watched the blind man move down the street  
Swinging his long red and white cane to and fro.  
A shuffling gait made from not lifting his feet  
As he proceeded down the sidewalk just so.

Tap, tap, tap ever so constant and so forlorn;  
Tap, tap, tap every morning and on into night;  
Tap, tap, tap a sad and one without scorn;  
Tap, tap, tap made by one who knows no light.

So thankful am I that I can see the day;  
So glad am I that I have the vision of my sight;  
So happy am I that I can see to go my way;  
So sad that I cannot take away the eternal night.

Tap, tap, tap like the beat of a ticking clock  
Tap, tap, tap echoing softly into the air  
Tap, tap, tap ever so surely, down the block  
Tap, tap, tap slowly moving from here to there.

- *Blind Man's Walk* © Leonard Yarbrough, 1998

## **Downtown**

I took a stroll downtown today,  
It was a depressing sight;  
Empty storefronts, deserted streets,  
Trash scattered about, traffic was light

The buildings were there, neglected,  
But where were the people?  
Some vagrants sitting along the curb,  
And far away I saw a steeple.

I wished I had not come here  
Where there was so little left to see.  
And I could remember another time  
When downtown was the place to be.

Once this was a place of energy, hope;  
Once this was a place of ambition, thrift.  
Now it is just another inner city desert,  
Waiting patiently for a costly facelift.

I turned a corner, looked around;  
Watched a cop kick a loose board;  
Saw a hooker standing slackly  
in a doorway, lonely and untoward.

Downtown had died, some time ago;  
Wasn't noticed, there was no funeral.  
The politicians still meet and talk  
About the future and other folderol.

I will not go there again, I think.  
It's too depressing, and the boulevards  
Once so dynamic are potholed, cracked,  
Vacant and scattered with glass shards.

- **Downtown** © Leonard Yarbrough, 1998

## *The Learned Rascals*

Professor, fakir, beggarman, charlatan, thief -  
Avoid them, they bring nothing but grief.  
The professor is the worst, for he claims  
Nothing but the truth, which he confesses,  
Is whatever rubbish that he thinks to say  
No matter that it won't stand the light of day.

The fakir is sly, seeking to fool the population  
With the outward show of self emulation  
And piety, stoic, firm, unyielding, and a fraud  
Through and through, and you and I applaud  
While he befuddles our minds, even our souls.  
He the knowing duper, and we the dumb fools.

I suppose that the beggarman is some better  
Of them, I reckon, with a silver line of patter.  
Asking everyone that passes by for just a tittle  
Not so very much, you see, just a bit, a little.  
All the while sneering inside at the timorous  
Who salve their conscience by being generous.

Beware the charlatan, too; trickery is his design  
As he seems to appear caring, kind, and benign  
Outwardly, he wants to help, asking for naught  
Inwardly, he sneers at all who become caught  
In his snare, for he is a clever fellow, likable too.  
And he knows that there is nothing we can do.

Of them all, I most worry about the thief  
He takes from others, for it is his belief  
That whatever he wants is his to take  
Whether it be riches or just a piece of cake  
It is his due, you see, and we have to play  
The game by his rules, for he will have his way.

Pedant, fakir, beggarman, charlatan, thief -  
Avoid them, they are nothing but a lot of grief.  
By now I'm sure you know what I have to say  
We are all of them, the same; there is no way  
To avoid what we are, for it is part of the game  
That we who they are, we are all the same.



## *Call of the Open Road*

Good-bye, my love, I cannot stay.  
The open road calls me today.  
There are places yet to be seen  
And places I have not yet been.  
Do not cry for me, my lover,  
For I was born to be a rover,  
A traveling man is who I am;  
I've all I need, a stick and my tam,  
Come with me, if you will, I cannot stay  
The weather is fair; we'll go far today.  
The wanderlust is strong, very strong.  
The weather is fair; I must move along.  
Goodbye, my love, I cannot stay.  
The open road calls me away.

- *Call of the Open Road* © Leonard Yarbrough, 1998

## **The Vacant Room**

I walked by an old schoolhouse today.  
Roof was sagging, windows all shattered.  
There were no doors, not a one to push.  
I wandered in, bemused, and a bit tattered,  
For I'd traveled far that day, up since dawn,  
But I was curious, at the unexpected hush.

Walked into what had been a classroom  
Filled with dry lectures and students' laughter.  
Those were gone now, time had taken its toll;  
An old desk there, and a well used blotter.  
Crooked blinds still hung, cobwebs all around;  
No chairs were left, only an old class roll.

Where are the scholars of yesteryear, I mused?  
Where are they and what have they done?  
Traces remained, an old button, a tea bag.  
Ceiling all cracked, the paint long gone;  
Dirty mirror, cracked, crooked on a wall,  
Motes of dust in the air, in the corner a rag.

I stopped and listened, nothing could be heard.  
Time had taken its toll; the present an intruder;  
Just the past there, in that room, everywhere.  
So I waited, contemplating what must have been  
A place of learning, a refuge from chores at home;  
But now a place that is nothing, nowhere.

- *The Vacant Room* © Leonard Yarbrough, 1999

## Lazarus

Lazarus rose from the dead, so they say.  
I don't know, I wasn't there, not that day.  
Still, it must have been a fine thing.  
After all, when you're dead, zing!  
You're gone, there's no tomorrow,  
Only those left behind to sorrow.

I wonder how it occurred back then?  
Not many had revived after that end.  
Had he any thoughts about coming back?  
Or was he glad to get out of that sack?  
What do you do when the dear departed  
Returns, as though he had never started?

Did the undertaker have to repay his fee?  
What about all those flowers – they weren't free.  
I guess that it is all right to return from the dead;  
Seems like a worrisome thing, it must be said.  
I think that Lazarus committed a very great crime.  
After all, he cheated death -- for a time.

--*Lazarus* © Leonard Yarbrough 1999

## Grace

I remember Grace.  
She was a cousin, older  
But she always took time  
To show a small boy that  
She cared.

One November she died.  
I do not know how or why.  
The world turned dark,  
And the rains came down.  
I feared.

The years passed,  
I traveled far and often.  
Still, I often thought  
About cousin Grace.  
And I cried.

Do you have a cousin  
Like my cousin Grace?  
I hope that you do.  
Everyone needs love,  
And a bit of pride.

Grace © Leonard Yarbrough 2001

# Tears

Tears... tears ... and still more tears...  
When will the tears come to an end?  
Tears... tears ... and still more tears...  
Listen to the crying that gives the tears.  
Tears... tears ... and still more tears...  
Sense the agony behind the tears.  
Tears... tears ... and still more tears...  
Feel the pain and the anguish of loss  
Tears... tears ... and still more tears...

Tears... tears ... and still more tears...  
But there are also tears of joy...  
Tears... tears ... and still more tears...  
Look for the beauty of the world.  
Tears... tears ... and still more tears...  
Savor the stillness and the awe of God  
Tears... tears ... and still more tears...  
Look on all that is grand about man.  
Tears... tears ... and still more tears...

Tears... tears ... and still more tears...  
Too, there are tears of triumph and glory.  
Tears... tears ... and still more tears...  
At the realization that we are mortal.  
Tears... tears ... and still more tears...  
At the realization that we are flawed.  
Tears... tears ... and still more tears...  
At the realization that we are loved.  
Tears... tears ... and still more tears...

Tears © Leonard Yarbrough 2001

## ***A Teacher's Lament***

We do not study history much any more.  
Nor do we read grand literature.  
It is irrelevant, so say the savants.  
Only our feelings matter, and  
We cannot talk of pain, or death,  
They may remind us of other miscreants.

Humankind is basically good, they say.  
History suggests otherwise, literature too.  
So we will not examine those issues.  
After all, feelings are the thing today.  
Who dares to stop and suggest  
Our self-centered lives are flimsy tissues?

We do not read history much anymore,  
Nor do we read grand literature.  
Perhaps we should look at ourselves today  
And admit that somewhere in our teaching  
We have been both wrong and foolish.  
Ignorance is a terrible price for us to pay.

**A Teacher's Lament** © Leonard Yarbrough 2001

## The Old Man

See the old man sitting all alone,  
Staring out into who knows where.  
Do you wonder what his thoughts are?  
Of lost youth, daring deeds, sea faing,  
Or of grand adventures, sights so rare.

Perhaps he was in one a Great war,  
Serving his country and its proud flag.  
Perhaps he recalls a long gone mate  
Who is gone, and he is all alone;  
And all he can do is to sit and wait.

See the old man scratch his head, just so,  
And reach for the newspaper at his side.  
He looks a moment, nodding all the while,  
Thinking, perhaps, of some past event  
Which pleases him, for there is a smile.

I walked over and sat down beside him.  
Then, as he turned and looked me over,  
I thought about what I could say.  
But before I could say a single word,  
He spoke, "Why don't you just go away?"

See the old man sitting all alone,  
Staring out into who knows where.  
I do not wonder what his thoughts are,  
Of lost youth, daring deeds, sea faing,  
Or of grand adventures. I don't care.

**The Old Man** © Leonard Yarbrough 2002

# *The Land of Nod*

Here deep inside the land of Nod  
No one is strange, no one is odd.  
Still, there are some curiosities  
Flitting in the flowers with the bees.

There is the marvelous White Rabbit,  
Whose only virtue is a lone repetitive habit  
Of fretting over small things known to him,  
But to the rest of us are just a whim.

Then there is the marvelous Cheshire Cat  
Smiling to all, while all the while he grins.  
Nothing happens, but we all feel really good  
After all, it's not about doing as we should.

Next we have the wicked witches, in all colors,  
Who have many enemies, and no neighbors.  
Everyone is a threat, none can be trusted,  
And whoever tries promptly gets busted.

And let us not forget the lowly adder,  
A sneaky creature, far down the ladder,  
Whose vicious bite is seldom noticed  
Until the victim is suddenly missed.

It is a strange place for us to be in,  
Hidden away in a land so seldom seen  
By normal people, who are able to know  
The difference between the high and the low.

Yes, welcome to the Land of Nod,  
A strange land, which is always odd,  
Where many things are strange indeed,  
And survival is always the only creed.

**The Land of Nod** © Leonard Yarbrough 2002



## **No Answers**

Space and stars, planets and comets, dreams gone awry;  
Cold kisses, imagined wrongs, and long, lonely nights.  
Careless words, idle thoughts, and absent friends,  
When did they leave, and why all the fights?

Too many weekdays and too few weekends;  
Too much to do for too many and for too little pay  
And so we rush back and forth, hither and yon.  
What are we doing, for whom, and who can say?

**No Answers** © Leonard Yarbrough 2002

## **To Chelsea**

Chelsea went to heaven one Saturday.  
St. Peter greeted her at the gate.  
Dogs do not go to heaven, they say.  
They have no souls, it's not their fate.  
We know better, you and me.  
Dogs do go to heaven; for they  
In their loyalty allow us to be  
Just as we are, with feet of clay.

Chelsea did not care about that.  
She took care of each of us, in her way.  
She was the queen wherever she sat,  
And we were hers to love and obey.  
When she left us on that day so sad  
We wept, it was hard to say good-bye  
To a loyal dog whose grace we had  
Now she's at home in up on high.

**To Chelsea** © Leonard Yarbrough 2003

## **My Buddy**

My buddy departed the other day.  
He took the trip to far away.  
It came as a surprise to us all,  
That he was answering a call  
That came from far off above.

My buddy departed the other day.  
For him, a safe journey I pray,  
As he traverses the great span  
Of space and time, this man  
Called away to heaven to rove.

My buddy departed the other day.  
I would have gone along the way.  
He did not ask me, nor gave any clue  
That he was moving into the Big Blue.  
I guess it was time for him to move.

My buddy departed the other day.  
I miss him, this pal, what can I say?  
He gave me counsel, strength, and  
A sense of what it is to be a man.  
I miss the tales that he wove.

My buddy departed the other day.  
I guess he had to go away.  
He was a dear friend, a good mate.  
I had things to tell him; it's too late.  
Hell is missing those we love.

# Three Roses

One rose is for you  
One rose is for me  
One rose is for we are about to be

Do not be surprised  
Do not deny me  
There's a long path and places to see

One rose is for you  
One rose is for me  
One rose is there for all eternity

Here is a possibility  
Here is the opportunity  
You are mine, I am yours, if you want me

One rose is for you  
One rose is for me  
One rose beckons by a tall oak tree

Listen to your heart  
Lead with your mind  
As I whisper softly and claim you as mine

One rose is for you  
One rose is for me  
One rose reminds us that we are our destiny

Do not be reluctant  
Do not stop or flee  
The universe has said we are meant to be.

One rose is for you  
One rose is for me  
One rose blooms there for all eternity.

**Three Roses** © Leonard Yarbrough 2003

## Two Hearts

Two hearts beating as one, though far apart.  
Two hearts beating as one, spanning across space  
Two hearts beating as one in spite of the fates  
Two hearts beating as one, and I long for your face.

How do our hearts beat as one, I ask the sky?  
How does this happen when we are far away?  
How can I keep my love from crumbling into dust?  
How will I find the strength to face each day?

I call upon my faith to keep our hearts beating as one.  
I ask the gods for their favor, I pledge to them my life  
To keep us together while we are separated by distance.  
Nothing more can I do, for I shall have her as my wife.

Two hearts beating as one, though we are far apart.  
Two hearts beating as one, spanning across space;  
Two hearts beating as one, in spite of the fates  
Two hearts beating as one as I reach for your face.

We are the blessed, we are beloved one for the other.  
We have always dared reach for love, and it is said  
We have kept the faith; maintained our shrine of love.  
We have wept, wondered, and now will go on to wed.

Two hearts beating as one, for we are never far apart.  
Two hearts beating as one, spanning across space;  
Two hearts beating as one, in spite of the fates  
Two hearts beating as one, as I reach to touch your face.

**Two Hearts** © Leonard Yarbrough 2004

## *Not Needed*

There he sits, all alone with his memories.  
Once, he was involved, greatly sought.  
Many called for his knowledge and skill,  
And many were those whom he taught.

He accomplished many daring things,  
Large projects, some small, he had done.  
Now, there is nothing for him to do  
Except sit alone there out in the sun.

Oh, he can still think, he is not infirm,  
His clasp is strong, he has his wits,  
Except in the eyes of those who decide  
Such matters. And so alone there he sits.

What do you think about, that old man?  
Are you bitter and perhaps angry, too?  
Are you lonely, out there in the sun?  
Do you yet dream of things to do?

There he sits, quite all alone in the sun.  
Perhaps he thinks of his past deeds.  
Perhaps he plans of things yet to do.  
Or perhaps he just sits with no needs.

*Not Needed*, © Leonard Yarbrough 2005

# Birthstone

My woman's birthstone is the fiery Opal,  
Torn from the mother Earth at its birth.  
Full of fire and in repose the hue of milk  
That flows from her breasts to nurture  
The man child who lies in her arms,  
Dreaming there against skin of silk.

Opal is her birthstone, full of fire as she.  
The color of white clouds hovering in the sky  
Like her stone, she rests in serenity.  
And when engaged, fully so, lightning bolts  
Cannot match her courage or her passion.  
She is my woman for all eternity.

One Opal for her hand, one on a chain  
Two more for her ears, do I adorn her.  
Gifts from her man, a man who knows  
That she is my true mate for life, and  
We two have become one so completely.  
She is mine, I am hers, and it shows.

Fire and milk, flame and breast, my mate.  
I pray that she may forever be kept safe  
From peril, knowing that she will take  
Risks more than most mortals, that is her way,  
As she rights a wrong, or comforts a child,  
I love her. I sacrifice myself, for her sake.

I give these Opals to my Woman, to wear.  
They show very well my gift from God  
That He has given this once proud man  
Who hears the wisdom sent from above.  
Dear Lord, guide her, keep her safe  
And always hold her in your hand.

The Opals are for my Woman, my true mate.  
Given in love, of love, and for love.  
Full of fire, yet signifying calm and rest.  
By the grace of God I am hers, she is mine.  
When we are apart, she knows when I think  
Of her. We are content. We are blessed.

**Birthstone** © Leonard Yarbrough 2005

## **My Old Dog**

My old dog and I are quite alike.  
We do not move as well as we used to.  
Our joints are stiff, our limbs are weak.  
We are content to rest more than to do.

My old dog and I are very much alike;  
We both prefer to bask in the sun.  
And we don't move so well anymore,  
We had rather sit in the shade than run.

My old dog and I dream of the past.  
We recall when we were more curious.  
We wandered the fields, looking,  
Seeking, hunting, and seldom serious.

Now we watch the clouds in the sky,  
And we scratch an itch if we have to.  
That's about all we can do now,  
And we seldom want anything to do.

We don't travel very far any more.  
We're too old to move very fast.  
Still, we remember the good times,  
When we were young, back in the past.

My old dog and I are quite alike.  
Lazing around now is our notion of fun,  
Thinking of all the good times we had,  
As we grow older basking in the sun.

Bury the two of us together, if you will.  
We'll mosey across the Great Divide,  
Seeing what we can see, two old ones  
Who've lived their lives quite satisfied.

**My Old Dog** © Leonard Yarbrough 2009.

## Turtles and Frogs and Little Tadpoles

Turtles and frogs, and little tadpoles  
Tracks in the mud and a lost feather  
from some old bird lying there.  
It's a peaceful spot, here in the shade  
Under the limbs of an old beech tree.

Turtles and frogs, and little tadpoles  
The smell of honeysuckle is in the air;  
The day is warm, clouds are puffy.  
The locust sings, and the old crow caws,  
While June bugs buzz around a tree.

Turtles and frogs, and little tadpoles  
I come to this place often now;  
It used to be seldom that I did.  
Many things have happened, and many  
Are the things that I could have done.

Turtles and frogs, and little tadpoles  
Skittering minnows, waterdogs too.  
An old Blue heron flaps slowly by,  
Ignoring all as if to say to one and all,  
What are you doing out in the sun?

Turtles and frogs, and little tadpoles  
The splash of a playful fish disturbs  
the calmness of the pond and then  
Everything settles down into a quiet.  
Only a moment, for soon I must run.

Turtles and frogs, and little tadpoles  
Tracks in the mud and the smell of hay  
Fills the air as the cows next door  
Head for the barn at the end of the day,  
And fireflies begin their mating dance.

Turtles and frogs, and little tadpoles  
Honeysuckles vines and muscadines  
Hang heavy on the vine, waiting for  
The picking, making into jelly and wine.  
What fool thinks this all is by chance?

**Turtles and Frogs**, © Leonard Yarbrough 2010