



OCTOBER GARDEN

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For family and friends, a little collection of poems in memory of my late (first) wife Susanne Abigail Barkan (May 16, 1959 – September 10, 2011). Write to me at cdm@craigdmiller.com. © Craig D. Miller, revised December 8, 2020.

PASSAGE (II)

It began 6 years ago
when my dear wife Susanne
found colon cancer threatening

life changing, stressing,
and touching down
with four major surgeries

three rounds of chemo
one round of radiation
and being lifted up

by the help of so many
friends and supporters.
And now we learn

in this time of healing
to breathe again
to expand our travels

and look out again
and see that amongst
the living, the billions

of the air and soil,
to move and work
amongst the living

with care and compassion
is the best way to travel

CDM January 31, 2009

THE CANDLE DREAM

Last night I thought I lit a candle next to a small shrubbery at the edge of a yard, the green yard of a big white house which I arrived at after walking a few blocks for an unknown purpose.

The small shrubbery at the edge of the yard was dry, and a few twigs, too close to the candle, started burning. I snapped off the burning twigs to save the plant but my flat dream went vertical while the burning twigs dropped down, down a cliff to a much larger bush below me which started to smolder before I could retrieve the embers. Having no time and no water I watched the large bush burn and burn, and soon saw a frog and other small amphibians roll down dead from the heat, towards the lake that appeared below the bush. Since I was now on the bottom of a cliff at the lake I had no choice but to ascend the cliff to get back to the yard of the big house. But how to ascend when the swinging apparatus that appeared at the top of the cliff kept on frustrating my purpose? Well, there was no way until the strange acrobatic man in tights appeared to demonstrate the proper back flip up over the cliff, onto the green yard of the big white house.

Now after this dream it is early morning, and I can reflect on conversation with my wife last night where she burst into flame, briefly illuminating our mutual fatigue after I had asked a question of unknown purpose. We were both tired, irritated, and very close to, but not close enough to the cool lake of sleep. The bush burned.

I am so sorry, my dear wife. Small amphibians have died and all I have is the feeling of foolishness, illustrated by the candle of my dream.

CDM January 27, 2009

FOURTH ROUND

The 4th round
is the survivor's round
where like the last two rounds
after the good news of recovery
come the seasonally short days
and cool news of another tumor
that grows in conjunction with
the spreading mid-winter light

we who are the supporters
wonder as does she
at how we will stay
bright and not batty
and whether we will even
be here late enough
in our fleeting
life to witness another
round of this
continuing story.

CDM February 16, 2010

THE COMING AND GOING

The end of summer
is sweet indeed
with you by my side

Glorious bright days
a little shorter
crisp cool nights
like a dimpled smile

Your quick song and smile
brighten the autumn days

June was hard, unripe
for the likes of me and you

But now we harvest
the seasons themselves
even knowing
that the rough stone
was always there, my peach,
the core of our union
that will outlast
these ancient days

CDM September 26, 2010

WE DANCED

We danced this summer she and I and I feel so fortunate because I learned so much from her and even more so as she was preparing to leave. The feathers of the arrow were pointing to where we are headed now.

Twenty years ago it was two dances and rescued branches that caught my attention, and even then I felt so fortunate having learned so much from her even as we were just beginning to meet. The feathers of the arrow were pointing to where we are headed now.

Now we are separated and our house is filled with that direction, without her but full of her wisdom, feathers of the arrows that point the way to this unknown day.

CDM October 18, 2011

After meeting Susanne at a dance or two in 1991, on a first date we walked through the woods of Whately. She impressed me with a curious kindness where she would stop here and there to rescue the branches of trees by clearing them of debris from a recent wind storm. Curious too was the feeling of dancing around the kitchen, in early 2011, a little fun with Susanne, knowing she is weakening yet feeling fortunate for all of the learning and growing we have had together.

LEAKING

early morning

the world is leaking
rain / tears
before the dryness comes out

I look to the horizon
and see the sun
does rise

and son was born
and wife has died
and friends and family

are around me
and I wonder
about the mystery

of the
ordinary
light and dark
dry and wet
and next

what track
will I
or the heavenly bodies
choose to take

CDM December 8, 2011

VALENTINE

don't think for a minute
that because Susanne is not here
I'll be missing my Valentine

the best parts of our love
are moving outward

through family and friends
through teachers and students
through chance encounters

with strangers
a kind word here
a kind deed there

expanding without limit
filling the air
everywhere

CDM January 27, 2012

REMEMBER

will we remember
will we remember
those who are gone?

we will remember indeed
the good we have received
we will remember in song

with joy and compassion
we will act while we can
and remember what we learned
how they helped us along

with a glass not yet empty
and joy in our hearts
while life is still with us

we will remember with deeds
and voice
for those in need
the good they have taught us
with joy
in our song

CDM January 25, 2012

OCTOBER GARDEN

Was it better
to have loved and lost and learned and listened,
than never to have learned at all?
I hear your silent voice
right now, my dear,
whispering sweet truths
evoking the wellspring
as I work in the garden
hearing the wind in every leaf
and seeing fire in the trees
and time stretching forward
towards every spring
and every fall

CDM October 8, 2012

WHEN I'M GONE

She said to me
quite simply
“you can do what you like
when I'm gone”

Shall I dance on your grave
read your postcards
ride the waves
watch the sunset
in the fall?

She said to me
quite beautifully
“you can do what you like
when I'm gone”

I have a house full of you
all your bright books
brave letters
and music too

She said to me
that I was quite free
'cause I can do
what I like
when she's gone

I'll be traveling far
and she'll be with me
a twinkling star

all her wit
all her joy
all her care
all her vigor
bursting, bursting through

Oh she left me full
she left me weak
and she left me strong

and I'll feel
what I feel
when she's gone

And you,
you too
can remember with me

take it,
take it with you
“you can do what you like
when I'm gone”

Susanne knew that when her colon cancer metastasized in 2006, and returned in 2007, that she might not live long. She recorded a CD, wrote poetry, and taught music in the spaces as the cancer returned again in 2008 and 2010. She gathered a brave and loyal crew to help her. In early 2011, not long after she was given a 2 to 12 months prediction from her doctors, she held a fabulous and tender party for about 80 friends and family and helpers, a party full of music and joy and gifts. Her instructions to me, her husband, about how to memorialize her, were clear and specific and strong: “you can do what you like when I'm gone.” I am so grateful for her generosity and care and confidence in the right thing to do. Susanne died at home on September 10th, 2011 at age 52.

CDM October 26, 2012

GRANOLA LA-LA

There was a time when Ben was little
and could not say his Rs
yet he tried
to repeat all his mother would say.

And there was a time where adult friends
would repeat his “cweggie”
and thought it was cute.

And there was a time when I
used to make granola,
and Susanne was labeling
everything in the kitchen sweetly,

And in these breakfast gatherings
of three,
the “cweggie's granola la-la” jar
got its name.

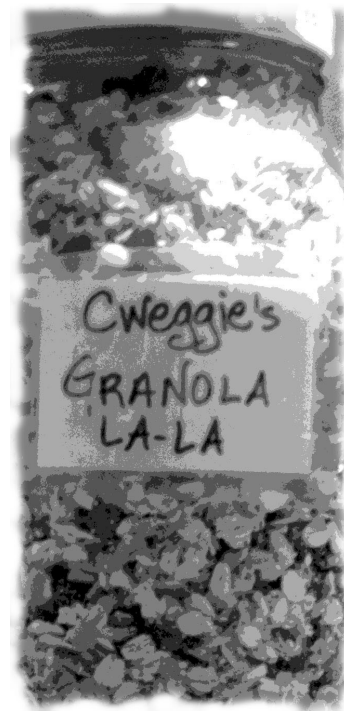
And then there was a time
where all of our family doings
were put on a medical hold,
then restarted,
then again,
medical hold.

And there was a time
where once again,
the recipe altered
three became two,
and all the old makings –
changed.

Cooking now,
I have fresh-made
granola
in the clean old jar
with Susanne's lovely label
of Ben's tender voicing
of mornings –

come and gone,
gone on to the next –

tasty breakfast cereal
home-made,
solo
and sweet,
with dark molasses
bitter sweet



CDM March 28, 2014