



**Susan Schaefer**

**Collected Poems**

# **Ride The New Morning**









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# Author's Preface

A youthful outpouring of grief at the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, *President, Dear President*, one of my earliest poems, was published in my junior high school magazine, childishly echoing the rhyme and cadence of Walt Whitman's monumental "O Captain! My Captain!" There was never a doubt in my mind that I would be poet.

Becoming a friend and student of the formidable Irish poet, Thomas Kinsella, as an undergraduate and graduate literature major at Philadelphia's Temple University, was both a blessing and a bane – his body of work and theory on poetry produced an almost contrary effect on my style. Kinsella, along with many other graduate school professors of the time, were tied to a highly classical and predominately masculine school of poetic structure and form that never resonated. When, in 1973, I was recruited to chair the Graduate Faculty's first ever Women's Art Festival I read this selection from Arthur Rimbaud's *Letters of the Visionary* to the assembled crowd:

*When the infinite servitude of woman is broken, when she lives for herself and by herself, the man, hitherto abominable, having given her her freedom, she too will be a poet! The woman will find some unknown! Will her worlds of ideas be different from ours? She will find strange, unfathomable, repulsive, delicious things; we shall take them, we shall understand them.*

As I listened to such esteemed faculty members as the poet Sonia Sanchez something inside shifted. I found a sound and meter that helped me to understand and appreciate my own poetic voice.

During the early 1980s I established the first poetry section in a bi-weekly community newspaper, *The South Street Star*, which I co-published with my former husband, Bob Ingram. Simultaneously, well before contemporary poetry slams, from a group of our regular contributors I also founded a roving

troupe of poets aptly named *The Star Bards* who performed regularly at bookstores and other events eventually garnering a wee groupie following.

I'm a firm believer in poetry as spoken word meant to be read aloud and "witnessed" by a live audience. My own work is enhanced by performing it. Growing up in the age of folk music, I found that Leonard Cohen and Joni Mitchell's poetry needed vocalization.

Throughout my career as a professional writer, I have turned to poetry, always finding its "economy of language" and lyrical structure essential for self-reflection, as well as to express meditations about relationships and about the natural and material worlds.

I hope that these poems of *Ride the New Morning*, some harkening back five decades, do just that.

Susan Schaefer

May 2020

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# Seeking Self

## RIDING THE NEW MORNING

I rode the new morning  
curled upon my ten speed  
determined as a jockey.

I sought the blue ribbon  
in a race, not against  
a chorus line of competitors  
but the menace of self-defeat.  
Each bead of sweat  
a self-wrought jewel  
in a hard-won crown.

I cut the morning mist –  
the woman the wheels one.  
Each hill fell away – a doubt conquered,  
a fear flattened,  
pumped into the power  
of leg and motion.

I rode the new morning  
swelled with my own strength,  
giddy with the greatness of human combustion.

## LIFTING THE RIVER

I bend at the River's edge  
to lift it like a summer sheet  
off the bed  
billowing forth from Itasca to the Gulf

Beneath its loamy marsh -  
its catacomb – Behold!  
the voices of ten thousand  
departed ones sing

We wed on this waterway  
witnessed by loved ones  
walked its banks in bud burst  
and naked branch times

It is my watery tuning fork  
my bough, my blanket  
my touchstone and tormentor

I lift it daily to hear ten thousand voices sing

## OPEN SOURCE BELIEF

Ask me not to select one path  
for that cleaves my heart  
splinters my soul

Rather I honor, love and respect  
the many roads  
finding wisdom wonder beauty in each

Fellow beings – let us  
forge – finally find –  
That essence of oneness

Contained in creatures of the sky sea earth  
the very dust of the cosmos  
where dwells the kernel of our bones

Are we not but stardust electrified  
by the breath of universal wind  
baked by solar sun?

## SOLSTICE HANUKKAH

I expand into nebulas --  
through creaking bones and leaking fluids  
my universal receptors grow supple.

NASA could use me.

I tremble with intergalactic pulsations  
transmitted from my icy Jupiter waters  
and melting mounds of Venus.

My trajectory is god/dess ho!

Light the candles of my soul,  
I lengthen like the days  
and rededicate myself.

## A YOM KIPPUR PRAYER

The contours of my heart need paving  
A sealant of comfort and care  
To line those fine cracks  
And crevices of your love lost

My soul wants mating  
Not kinetic sparks but  
A solid ray to twine with mine  
Forming that better brighter beam

My mind seeks a partner  
To match it wit for wit  
Not in competition but collaboration  
A happy equal who also  
Cherishes the rise another provides

Let them blow the ram's horn in heaven  
Where you flew  
Signal to the earthly ones  
She is healed she is love she awaits

## BACKYARD BUDDHA

Backyard Buddha  
buried beneath the drift  
of fallen leaves.

We eyed you all summer,  
stationed as you were  
in the garden department at Sears.

Black and gilt cast concrete  
your quiet countenance so comforting;  
we wanted you to grace our garden  
to sit and shine upon our backyard shrine.

But Buddha,  
you were paradoxically pricey  
for one who had so eschewed the material world.

It surely was our clean karma  
that guided us to the garden center  
for their end-of-season sale  
to find that you had been  
reduced by half, though not in glory

Backyard Buddha  
buried beneath the drift of fallen leaves  
guide and guard our humble home.

# EXTRAORDINARY

Now the earth spins erratic on her axis,  
Roars forth waves that reclaim her children,  
Freezes life where once she warmed the tropic,  
Boils and melts great glaciers.

So simple this message.  
No intermediary need tell,  
No mosque, no synagogue,  
No church bell.  
No master, no slave.  
No heaven, no hell.

Ordinary, not ordained.  
Each soul perfectly contained,  
Worthy its own mastery of the mysteries.

No temple, tower nor turret conceals it.  
No mystic, priest nor guru reveals it.  
Come then make me  
No mystic neither, but merely your shepherd.  
Put down your scriptures and take up your heart!

Treat all upon the planet with grace.  
Learn well that paradise is no space -  
But here  
Within  
Energy so sought from without  
Contained in the commonplace.

In nurture miracles are found.  
Food and water enough abound,

If we but set our imaginations upon it.

'Tis the business of Humanity

We're here for – no less, no more.

Crush malevolence with benevolence,

Debunk genocide, suicide, and needless pride.

Strength is giving.

We've the means to

Cast heaven on earth.

We are each extra ordinary. Once recognized

Our connected energy will expand the universe.

## CONTRADICTION ME

suspended between  
godliness and banality  
I'm equally at home  
devising ways to serve humanity  
or... to increase my larder!

## TUESDAY MORNING

my desk calendar rests  
in its plastic platform bed  
spiked by silver McDonald's arches  
mocking days –  
it's light years 'til Friday.

## THE I IN YOU WILL EVER BE

“The I in You,” he once said, as his bones disintegrated into dust,  
“will ever be always a We, even when the flesh festers and falls  
away. As long as I remain,” he said, “the I in You, You will be a We.”  
(After Ludwig Binswanger)

## CAT STRUTTIN'

that night I was cat-pawed and prowlin'  
struttin' the Satin Alley drag

that night I was cat-poised and balanced  
all back-arched for the takin'

you crept upon me, fingered the fluff of my neck  
and took one of my nine lives

crazy moon-struck cat, sheddin' it all,  
one life for one night

## DEHRA DUN – 1972

Like a whisper  
the Delhi darkness dropped

our feet naked  
our minds  
gone  
with mantra

the Ganges was black and cold  
but we bent and supped its brackish brew  
drank its typhus tainted froth  
and feared  
not  
at all

the current begged we follow  
shimmered beneath a solid silver disc  
lunatic light

multi-footed creatures  
marched across our naked feet  
stabbed them, drew welts

moon struck  
we backed from the current  
stood straining to pierce the mist  
that shrouded our eyes

up from the current  
we stood  
up from the Ganges

and though forbidden  
embraced  
and saw beyond the moment  
the movement, the madness

“It’s a different side of the moon.”

“Different than what?”

“What we see when we’re home.”

“I, I suppose it is.”

Then, in the swift black current  
we saw the moon coming at us  
no  
not the moon  
its reflection brilliant upon an object  
caught in the flow

a corpse  
a rotting carcass discarded  
tangled still in its beggar’s garb  
sent in to the silent solemn river  
holy foam

for him  
we came  
for him  
our feet naked  
our minds  
gone  
with mantra

## LOVING CHILD

Only child, so lonely child,  
your daddy's old, your mommy weary.

Only child, so lonely child,  
your hopes are bright, your prospects dreary.

You learn fast and you learn well.

A pinch of dust becomes your brother,  
a patch of quilt your baby sis,  
you spin daydreams to catch company;  
you quickly fill your emptiness.

Only child, once so lonely,  
you learn fast and you learn well.  
You cultivate a global family,  
you'll grow up loved  
and loving child.

## TUB TONIC

“One tub tonic, please.  
Warm the water;  
heavy on the herbs.”

A sane restorative  
at day’s end or dawn --  
chamomile cocktail:  
curative of the orient.

While wavelets wander  
over floating fingers,  
lapping the bloat  
of my belly and breasts,  
I soak in the drink.

Watching through the wood-framed  
window of my private wet bar  
where backyard maple  
couples with the southeast breeze  
performing a pre-rain rumba...

“Aah! make it a double.”



# Seeing Others

## EMMA

By chance I glanced at my reflection  
and saw there – you.  
I've not noted you in my face before,  
but I've felt you inhabit my thighs and belly  
so round like yours,  
and at times my woman smell recalls  
images of you and me together in  
our claw-footed tub,  
me so small next to your Boticellian swells  
ripe in womanhood.  
And in my bathroom now with  
its claw footed tub  
hangs our Atlantic City portrait –  
you, Romanian, really, gypsy-looking  
and me in the 50s sailor suit  
posed in an-honest-to-God  
paper moon.

Mommy  
you were mommy  
never mother  
sometimes, ma  
and so sadly  
you were not all there;  
not quite sane,  
a little over ripe,  
but a beauty in an aesthetic long departed.  
And mostly you were mine,  
though I never showed the love,  
always called “daddy’s girl”...

## TO DAD AT SEVENTY-NINE

Born at the dawn of the auto age,  
you've always been car-bitten.  
High priest of the highway,  
patron of motion,  
your office a Chevy or Ford  
rolling on Ridge or Columbia Avenue.

Our best times –  
you, me and mom –  
on Sunday sojourns  
Brooklyn and back,  
Baltimore and back  
in time to get me in bed for school.

We'd do "The Schaefer Theater",  
off-key and crazy renditions of:  
"Heart of my Heart", "Sweet Rosie O'Grady",  
"Sidewalks of New York".

We were the best family we were en route.

Thanks for your drive, your joy for journey  
of body and mind,  
my fatherfriend.

## ONE LIGHT

slowly slipping from me  
your spark  
that seminal flame  
that lit me into being  
and lights me still  
is flickering  
fading  
slowly  
your silver sheen pales

yet  
I shine for you  
in crystal tears  
of parting  
in golden comfort  
of knowing  
you'll glow hereafter  
you'll glimmer  
here  
in me father

## LEGACY

Not accounts mounting interest,  
but interest mounting in accounts

of injustice  
prejudice  
poverty  
power

You were the mensch of the minions -  
hard working hard playing soft hearted

Widowed twice to raise  
two citizens a full generation apart,  
building our bank accounts with conscience -  
your will a legacy of spirit and heart.

## ADA POTATO, WHOOPS

Aunt Ada, pint-sized in stature,  
gigantic in soul.  
More mother than aunt,  
heart of my heart.

You, my mother, Aunt Lilly,  
orphaned girls stranded in Philly's  
Rebecca Gratz Home.  
Artful survivors.  
While your sister suffered  
her mental decline  
you took me for  
entire summers, long holidays  
making me sister to your  
Hannah and Sarae.

You'd set Hannah and me loose  
to roam Olney, and devilish cubs  
we were!  
"Pinching" unnailed items from  
Sears on the Boulevard,  
"fudging" free "bowls" from  
Adams' Lanes,  
having high adventures as:  
pirates,  
cowgirls,  
orphans  
in the wilds of Tookany's Longcrest.

Endless hours spent in your 'rec' room –  
a wonderland renovated by Uncle Al.  
Beneath each leather banquette that  
flanked the room were storage spaces,  
hiding places –  
corrals for our knight and steeds,  
cowboys and horses,  
Barbies and Kens

and Hooks and Ladders.  
Most amazing of all –  
the glass brick, back-lit bar –  
our castle.

Our bathroom shows for you and mommy  
were renowned. Hannah and Susie moonbeam,  
mermaid, wet cherubs behind the glass door of  
the shower.

You, more childlike than we, perched tub-side  
swinging your legs, singing your refrain –  
“Ada Potata, Ada Potata, Ada Potata –  
Whoops!” as you fell into the tub  
and we cried with laughter.

My father called you,  
“His Blondie”  
though just like Auntie Mame  
each week could find your tresses  
a new hue: redhead, brunette, auburn  
but always back to blonde again.

Blessed with a Yiddisha voice  
a notch from professional,  
you took it wherever there were  
others in pain.  
Your circuit not the famed Borscht Belt,  
but those Gothic retreats from society –  
Byberry, the Inglis house, where the old, infirm  
and insane were kept from polite view.  
You brought the residents a blotch of color  
a spot of love, belting out your repertoire:  
“Has Anybody Seen My Gal”, “Toot, Toot,  
Tootsie”, “My Yiddisha Momma”  
and the family favorite, “Rosenbaum,  
That’s Me” (to the tune of “Harrigan”).

In my life I’ve never heard a word ‘agin’ ya’  
Heart of my Heart, Aunt Ada

## AMERICAN BEAUTY, ROSE

Tanta Rose, my baroness of Brooklyn,  
how I adored our journeys  
first to your “bachelorette” on West End Avenue –  
Aunt Mary and Edna next door with sweets and caresses.

Then, to Seacoast Terrace, a real luxury-view,  
oceanfront...  
the boardwalk, Brighton Beach, knishes,  
“footlongs” and the arcades of Coney Island.

The row of slippers always at your front door –  
off with our shoes to step on to (or into)  
your mile-high, milk-white and salmon  
Persian rugs.

The table seemingly set  
for a cavalcade of dignitaries,  
not for just your brother and his family.

And your cooking, like the accouterments,  
consistently first class.

The table you set! I can see myself  
on tippy-toes to catch the glisten and gleam  
of the silver, china, and crystal.

A pink grapefruit with lipstick red  
maraschino cupped in its navel.

The gefilte fish, “Outta this world!”  
Followed by you steaming chicken “zuup”;  
more chicken, jello salad, rolls and  
the compote, from which I’d recoil.

The perfect New York finale –  
Entemann's and strong black coffee  
(mine always half milk) from a dazzling  
silver urn.

Before Uncle Joe died I came to stay,  
by myself, on the Metroliner, for the first time.  
That night, in the bathroom with poodle-painted  
toilet seat that said, "Whoopee, pop's home!" when  
you lifted the lid, you unfurled the bun at the nape  
of your neck: a shimmering sliver steamer brushed  
your back until your waist.

Your blend: taste with a touch of tradition.  
Your boast: "The best money can buy."  
But yours was earned elegance.  
Rosie, toast of the town,  
for years the contessa of cosmetic consultants  
schmearing the shadow, daubing the rouge,  
brushing the mascara, and inventing shades  
on a million Manhattan mavens  
from your front and center platform  
in the world's busiest Woolies.  
And, at 83, you're still a beauty,  
and certainly everyone's Aunt Rose.

## METAL TIGER, WATER DRAGON

I am a Metal Tiger conceived in passion -  
Consumed by it.

You are the Water Dragon bathed in patience -  
Absolved by it.

I pounce, prance and dance.

You coil, roil and boil.

My expression bursts -

Your reflection pools.

My big cat craves approval.

Your mythic reptile shuns it.

How, now, do we blend?

Our courage matches tooth and claw,

Our generosity fills mouth and maw.

Great Dragon fear not  
that your fire ignites me.

As your flames now subside

I crave, still, your heat inside.

Come, bring me your scales,

your great tail,

your fearsome mane,

and rest forever in my softer plane.

My stripes will hide you,

my hide protect you,

my fur soften your journey,

my sharp eye and vast heart

absorb your winged magnificence.

Until myths and legends lapse,  
they will know us wherever  
east meets west, yin nestles yang,  
and they will understand at last  
that fate our fortunes cast.

## WHAT HAVE THEY FOUGHT FOR?

So that peace would reign  
Old men complain  
Of taxes and weather  
Children skip to school  
And April bring a fool

So that nations could vote  
Youth their books tote  
Freely anywhere  
Mothers caress  
And we do our best

Today I honor the warrior  
Who fought for the field of thought  
For ideas brought forth  
And grown men's silliness  
And genderless, color-free life  
And less ritualized strife

You were the soldier of love  
The dove  
Not bound by strictures  
But a soaring soul  
Wise beyond our cosmos  
Gentle beyond words  
Loving beyond self

Today I honor you  
For your life  
Was what the fallen ones  
Fought for

## ALMOST MOVING DAY

I unplugged the fountain  
its reassuring gurgle now silenced.

The plants take up residence  
at the mother-in-law's later -  
my leafy children off to foster.

Knickknacks and tchotchkes  
pruned, scattered to friends -  
small memory gifts of going.

The purge is painful  
yet therapeutic -  
a peek at the waste of want.

But your precious items -  
notes written in that wise hand,  
the letters clear as mountain spring;  
the eyeglasses that framed your  
noble nose, sat upon your chiseled cheeks,  
the comb that slid through your graying hair,  
your toothbrush, dear,  
that touched those teeth  
that my tongue oft lapped  
when we lay in deep embrace;  
your silk royal blue boxers - so sensual,  
the 'bumblebee' striped cotton ones -  
so humorous;  
these, dear, I've placed like treasures  
in one small drawer to accompany  
me to the new world.

## AN ANNIVERSARY LOOMS

Once again the sucking  
a banshee in my bowels  
turning my insides out

Ah, here comes the songbird  
to my babbling waterfall  
drinking greedily  
shooting a glance my way.

The banshee hates that bird  
who flies so freely  
who mocks the darkness  
and warbles down the cool  
renewing water.

You would hate that banshee  
you are that songbird  
you cheer the light  
and chase the darkness

Your wings flutter  
beating furiously to bring me back  
making me see that banshees only  
exist in dark spaces

## CHESTER

Expansive outlier  
Bicycling the town  
In your top and tails  
Squeezboxing for a smoke  
House of tin  
Nesting beneath  
10th Avenue Bridge  
garden of bottle  
and boxes  
coat of buttons  
and pins  
defying authority  
you defined our humanity

## KARLA'S WASH

Billowing in the breeze  
Lavender scented  
Polka dots the line  
Alfalfa field basks  
Bees buzz  
Sassafras tea  
Calls a  
Plum City Medley

## YOUR RUN

Often I wake before you  
cherishing your boy/man sleep face  
or, I peek your wise work look  
as you dance with words  
but the look, the face that's most free  
is your running face,  
as you say, your 'game' face  
when you take to the Wissahickon's  
woody nature trail  
making it to your personal track.

Past the gingerbread boat houses on the drive  
you are what we are –  
Easy and free  
committed and determined.

Even when the going gets rough  
you stick it out to end.

I like to think that  
the rapture of your run  
is the essence of our love.

# Material World

## AVES OF AUSCHWITZ

Along Mississippi's river road,  
at the stroke of full moon midnight,  
winter's wind whips  
a coven of crows;  
midnight-hued ash flakes,  
Corvus chorus  
cawing  
swirling  
whirling  
fiercely descending,  
peppering the ancient ash tree  
like so many beastly ornaments -  
a spontaneous memorial marking seventy years  
since other dust stopped raining over Oświęcim.

Were any trees left in Poland?  
Or were all hewn to stoke ovens reducing humanity to slag?

This murder of crows fractures my evening  
Robbing the respite of this ordinary drive.

## ALEPPO

Ash dusted poppet  
Doe-eyed target

In the name of god  
Sinister souls  
Ravage a child

In god's name  
For god's sake

Godless  
Mindless menacing  
Soldiers

Child is  
God's core –  
Every god  
Any god

God fearing  
God besotted  
God worshippers  
God forsaken  
World's children

Feeble  
Wretched  
Wanton wars –

Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, South Sudan, Pakistan Taliban,  
Ukraine, Somalia, CAR, Libya, Israel-Palestine, Yemen, Congo, India

Dusty  
Shell-shocked  
Bloodied boy

Your stains  
Blot out the sun  
In the name of God

## BOG BODIES

Her shoes almost modern –  
the cadaver of millennia past  
perhaps gone to collect water that day  
or to gather rice to feed a family

Maglemosian, Mesolithic sister  
your footwear a wonder of intricacy  
informing that beauty and skill mattered

Peat preserves as well as warms  
Yields the textures of skin and cloth  
Reveals lifelike lips and eyes  
Squeezed in Lethe's final scene

Northern climes so harsh on life  
Are kind on death  
Salt air blown across the Jutland wetlands  
Produce peat of museum quality

New peat replacing old  
Releasing humic acid to pickle  
Our cells like fruit in a jar  
Devoid of microscopic organisms  
That chop and chew our mortal forms

Haraldskaer and Koelbjerg Women  
Toooundand Grauballe and Lindow Men  
Your ancestors wise enough to know  
That placing you in the bog at just the right moment Would keep your  
earthly form bacteria free forever

## ODE TO MARCH

Another season -  
Still empty  
Winter  
to March  
Away  
Bleak spring

Can you offer  
a blossom  
with petals soft  
as his lips,  
a stamen kind  
as his eyes?  
He who now pushes  
Spring forth from beneath  
the loam of foreign soil.

## THE LAMB OF MARCH

I arise,  
windows raised,  
moist sea breeze,  
twitching palms.

In this land of perpetual summer the lamb of March wears a different coat.

## TO APRIL

Trickster month  
begins with  
a fool's day,  
ends with  
the greatest passion play  
of a cross on Calvary  
or  
the parting of the Red Sea.

Cruelest month?  
when buds and babes  
push up and out  
and rain falls,  
and breezes beckon,  
and renewal calls.

Here,  
in the Northern Hemisphere,  
April brings  
the hope of spring.

## SPRING RAIN

Sitting serenely  
Droplets lash my windowpane

While steaming rich coffee  
Entertains my taste buds  
Nature sounds on iThing  
Words flow through

My finger tips

I blend an image  
From brainwaves  
To screen...  
Tap share

There  
On your screen  
Appears  
The footprint of my soul

## WORRY GARDEN

If worrying could raise my roses  
I'd have heady blooms.

If fretting could spark my zinnias,  
blaze my begonias,  
muster up my marigolds –  
my garden would glisten with glory.

If worrying could raise my roses...

## JONQUIL SERENADE

The sound of you  
Is music  
Jonquil, jonquil, jonquil

The look of you  
Is art  
Star cupping sun

The smell of you  
A banquet  
Sugar and spice

The shape of you  
Is music  
Trumpeting

Your aspects are  
a holy fellowship

## THE CLIMBING ROSE

Draped over sun baked bricks  
pink noses nestled next to thorn  
Loping this lane along the Maas  
we often loped hand-in-hand  
mother and babies duck and quack

The rose climbs above my reach  
I glance heavenwards  
the breeze blows gently  
you tell me I need not touch...yet.

## WINTER SOLSTICE

Darkened hands seek  
that crack beneath the door  
where shimmering  
gloves of light elongate

## SEAT BY THE RIVER

Should a bolt strike you – open your senses  
let it thunder through.  
Make yourself a seat by the river.  
Where once your trunk stood defiantly,  
invite others to rest.  
You leave a legacy, then, of open comfort –  
a stool by the river where you flow forever.

## THE SUN, THE MOON AND THE STARS: A BLESSING

May the sun always shine in you heart,  
May the moon glow upon your pillow,  
May the stars twinkle in your eyes,  
May your life be warm, well and wise.

# About the Author



Susan Schaefer is an independent journalist, writer, published poet, communications advisor, transitions coach and a former university professor, newspaper editor and publisher. Born and raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA, her journey has included living in Delhi, India, Bogotá, Colombia, Pompano Beach, Florida, Maastricht, the Netherlands, and her current home, Minneapolis, Minnesota where her high rise perch overlooks the mighty mother Mississippi River, a daily source of inspiration.





Ride the New Morning  
by Susan Schaefer

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