

Despair and Blessings: Two Narratives

Robert Friday and William Bergquist

This is the second in a set of documents written by Robert Friday and William Bergquist. As in the first document, Friday and Bergquist offer contrasting views of the life each of them is now leading. Sitting by the Atlantic Ocean in France, Bob reflects on the devastating dementia that has afflicted his loving wife. Bill reflects on the state of blessings in which he finds himself, with his wife sitting beside him, viewing the same ocean in the Eastern United States.

Bob

This week I finished another poem. This had its origins from a recent 5 day mental health escape I took out to the dramatic and glorious rocky coast of Bretagne near St Malo/Dinard/St Lunaire. On a craggy spit of land above where the emerald waters of the North Atlantic crash against those rocks I sat for an afternoon, contemplating Life and Love:

Amidst the Rocks and Water

Below . . . the sea waters, so émeraude and blue,
Scary craggy rocks, so savagely cool.
A lone gull cries sharply as it sails right on by.
Above . . . all this beauty. And me. Pondering why.

Why has this happened, why, oh damn. Why?
Tryin' to stay happy but there's just times I gotta cry
'Cause it hurts in my heart, in my head, in my soul.
My sweetheart ain't here, where these waves crash and roll.

She's not here. She's not there. She's nowhere to be found.
Oh, there's someone who looks like her, but she can't make a sound
That has any sense or meaning — that's almost all gone.
And what remains is confused, frightened, scared and forlorn.

So away I head, to these rocks and the sea
To breathe deep for a while, to recharge, to heal me;
Letting Nature's wild wonder and beauty prevail
If but for these few moments, as I stare down the dark trail.

But I miss her, I miss her, I miss "her" so damned much,
And I hate using all this beauty as a mental health crutch.
I just want to rejoice and breathe it in, to feel the grandeur inside;
And live back in the time when she was right by my side.
Sharing it all . . .

But no. That won't happen. Not now, never again.
Our adventures are over. There's just the memories of when
We would wander all over, and share in the glee
Of each awesome moment and all the stuff we would see.

Yes, oh yes, count me beyond grateful for all we have done.
It's been a life rich with joys — that's the Power of One.
Two hearts, one purpose — to soak it all in, side-by-side.
To live to the fullest - and we did that! Such an amazing ride.

But now as that path is sadly nearing its end,
I'm aching and hurting and I don't really know when
Or if I'll ever feel that deep connection, and that love.
So I stare at the rocks and the waves from my perch, high above.

Sorry, my Dear, can't let you see me cry.
I gotta stay "happy", gotta bring you my smile,
And a hug and some kisses, even if you can't say
Who this guy is that's holding you, who says that it's all OK.

So hold my hand tightly and just feel that I'm here,
Like those waves and the rocks, we'll face up to our fears;
We've ridden our trail: we surely gave it our best;
And now it's my time to help carry you, for the rest.

And with eternally beautiful waves of deep love, I will . . .



Bill

As I read Bob's poignant and heart-rendering poem regarding his wife, I reflect on my own life and time I spend viewing the currents of my own ocean – the same as that viewed by Bob, but many miles away. And my own feelings are quite different as I think about my wife – and as I sit by her on the deck of our ocean-side home. My feelings are not of despair; rather they relate to the blessings that seem to have been given to me in these senior years of my life. The poem I have written is responsive not only to Bob's poetic rendering, but also to the recent "death-by-dignity" chosen by a good friend, who had been living with horrible illness. I am struggling with my own spirituality and find this matter of being blessed is part of the struggle.

I Am Blessed, But Can I Acknowledge This Blessing

I am not a religious man
Though my friends say
That I am at least struggling
With my Beliefs.
I am Blessed,
But resist acknowledging
That I am Blessed

I sit on our deck
And look out over
The always changing
Inlet of the Atlantic Ocean
With tides flowing in and out
They Bless Me Every Day
Can I acknowledge
That I am Blessed

The rain fell gently yesterday
Forming a Rainbow over our Inlet
The sea, and sky, and sun and rain
Have formed a magnificent
Arch of color extending over our Inlet
Can I acknowledge
That I am Blessed

The sea birds and the forest birds
All congregate near our home
Chirping, squawking, clamoring
And soaring through the air
Providing an aviary show for me.
Can I acknowledge
That I am Blessed

I walk onto my deck in the evening
The lights glitter on my behalf
From across the Bay
Reminding me of the painting
Of the Starry Night over the Rhone
By Van Gogh, the Master of Light
Can I acknowledge
That I am Blessed

It is late afternoon, the days work is done
I sit beside my wife on our deck
Kathleen talks of caring for our children
And our friends
And a dear friend who yesterday
Died "with dignity" after a
Painful struggle with life
I am alive and in love with my wife
Can I acknowledge
That I am Blessed

I am reminded of a special play
Thornton Wilder's "Our Town"
Which I have seen many times
Beginning in High School
With an extraordinary
Performance, as the Stage Manager,
By my high school colleague,
Stacey Keach
Can I acknowledge
That I was blessed to know Stacey

In "Our Town," Emily pleas with us
To notice
To not let our life
Simply pass us by
To savor the precious moments
Right now.

Can I savor my moments
Especially with Kathleen
A wife who cares deeply
About other people
Can I acknowledge
That I am blessed
With Kathleen in my life

Bob

Bill, you have captured the question and the emotion so perfectly. I, too, am not of the religious bent. And when someone says "You're blessed" I struggle with that. By whom? For what? Is there a certificate that comes with that blessing? A cash reward? And yet, I find it hard to conger up another word that fits for what we are given. Lucky? Hardly. Privileged? Seems a little hoity-toity. So I guess "blessed" is as close as it gets.

And what you capture in your poem's narrative surely reinforces the question — and the emotions of the answer. Yeah, we are in some uncomfortably-phrased manner, "blessed" — you with your wife by your side still sharing the beauty of the world around us and I, still able to capture and connect with the comfort — and questions — given to me by those same surroundings, on different shores. Yeah, that's kind of it, isn't it? Similar surroundings, different shores! And so we continue. Life Finds a Way . .
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Authors

Robert Friday

Bob Friday was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, degreed in environmental biology and developmental psychology at the University of Pittsburgh and then headed off to Chicago to start his adult life. He served as a pesticides inspector for the EPA, drug salesman for Parke-Davis, and computer sales guy for Honeywell, where he got his first real camera - a Honeywell Pentax. Bob became an itinerant (means "poor"!!) folksinger, and he later served as an ad agency broadcast & events producer, creative director/owner of TGIF productions, inc. an events and corporate communications boutique. Finally in his long, varied career, Bob became a communications consultant, director at top boutique real estate agency in Venice Ca. Most recently, he is living the life as a freelance fine arts photographer in Paris, France where he and his wife, Debbie, have resided since moving there from Santa Monica Ca in 2019. Through it all, there has been one constant focus in his life -- (other than Debbie!): a passion for photography. be it nature, travel, landscape, people, architecture, portrait -- photography has been - pun intended -- his focus. capturing the essence of life, in its memories of the moments, big and small . . .



William Bergquist

Bill Bergquist has been blessed over a long career with work in three sectors of society. He has published more than 60 books across these three sectors. More than a dozen books concern postsecondary education and professional development in particular. Work in the field of organizational consulting and coaching has led to engagements with more than 1000 clients throughout the world and publication of a dozen books. The third sector is psychology. While serving as president of an international graduate school of psychology, William Bergquist has produced more than 40 books and 200 essays regarding personal, interpersonal, institutional, political and economic psychology, and founded the digital Library of Professional Psychology.

