



EVEN THE DEAD
ARE GROWING OLD

Poems by Don Winter

EVEN THE DEAD ARE GROWING OLD

By the same author of

Things About to Disappear (2005)

On The Line (2006)

Beware The Madmen (2007)

(co-author Robert L. Penick)

No Way Out But In (2008)

To Get It Cold (2009)

(co-author David J. Thompson)

Saturday Night Desperate: A

Retrospective (2009)

*EVEN THE DEAD
ARE GROWING OLD*

by

Don Winter

Working Stiff Press * dansheridanwsp@yahoo.com

Copyright © 2012 by Don Winter

All Rights Reserved

First Edition

First Printing

Acknowledgements—The author thanks the editors of the periodicals in which a number of these poems were previously published. Cover photo by David J. Thompson.

Distributed by Working Stiff Press, Niles, Michigan

Manufactured in the United States of America

To Gia

CONTENTS

- Cold Fact / 13
- Strip Bar: Hamtramck / 15
- No Visitation / 16
- My Grandfather was a Matewan Miner / 17
- My Dad's Silence / 18
- My Uncle Had Two Sayings / 19
- My Aunt Bids the World Adieu / 20
- When I Am Dead / 21
- Hearing the Landscape Tell the Story / 22
- Left Behind / 23
- As Time Goes By / 24
- Boast / 25
- Hamburgers / 27
- Posing / 27
- Breaking Down / 28
- Even the Dead are Growing Old / 29

Cold Fact

“To see what is in front
of one’s nose needs a
constant struggle.”
—George Orwell

When owners chain the factories for good
& leave for China with a shrug,
towns fall like dominoes, one by one.
Alleys turn to drugstores, churches to missions.
Houses go to various degrees of disrepair. Those who can

work sixteen hours a day,
seven days a week,
fifty two weeks a year
for Wal Marts, Burger Chefs, open shops, temps. What workers
bargained, often died, for lost. Lao-tzu said

you can find in evil good
if you are good enough.
But where’s the good in
“Ideally you’d have every factory
you own on a barge, tow it to where

labor costs were lowest”? Still,
small towns withhold
their terminal truth, too afraid
or indolent or drugged to ask
who is fucking them,

I mean really. To go beyond
the bosses and politicians
who rule world with a billion karats,
a billion sticks, to question
the capitalist political economy itself.

5 a.m., in Hamtramck, the Pit Stop
is open, where workers will soon
have their breakfast. The flag hangs
out front like a wrinkled tie. Conversations rattle
like so much loose change:

how Peterson split open his wife's head
like a junked window,
how Earl stole Itaana's six month late
welfare check, how Eugene splashed gasoline
on the boss's Cadillac. How it's no long a factory:

weather decides what to keep,
what to throw out.

Strip Bar: Hamtramck

The goddamn of music
was going on.
The dancer came out
dangling money carelessly.
She looked at our faces
as if they were small tips.
God she was good
when she danced out of her clothes.
Sweetheart, the others called her.
Shorty. Baby. For each of them
she smiled. I envied how
she let the backs of their hands linger
at the very top of her thigh.
When she finally got to me
I stuck a dollar bill
where my eyes had been.
Her face had the alert sleepiness
of a cat's. She smiled
vacantly, moved on to the next dollar.
I drifted into the night air.
The lights on my rig pushed
the dark aside, moved me
towards no house, towards
no one waiting.

No Visitation

The train twists through Michigan:
the yellow blur of farmhouses,
ribbon glimpse of rivers.
All night I keep arriving
in someone else's childhood.
And once a year you send
a postcard of his happiness.

My Grandfather was a Matewan Miner

They sit stiff, try to hold
their breath for the shutter. Shadows blend
into their clothes
where hardly a button shows, they are so black.
Coal's turned their faces
into dim candles. Their teeth gone at 30.
With each cough they still mine
the coal in the dark
of their lungs.
They stare down the future.
Dust will frame their dreams.

My Dad's Silence

When dad died he'd hardly spoken
to mom for weeks. I heard
the muffled spatters of his need.
He'd start to touch her arm, grunt,
move off to arrange whatnots
on the metal shelf, like jigsaw pieces
of a life he could no longer fit together.
It had been his silence that had hooked her,
so like her father's, though some mornings
she had trouble reading in this new version,
laid down her book & went to check
the macaroni, or stir the sauce.
Those final weeks she served him
dinner religiously at noon, ironed
even his underwear,
& when he tilted through the night,
her voice steadied him like a cane. Since he died
the bird feeder has sat empty.
She can't bring herself to fill it
like he used to,
to let the birdsong he created back in.

My Uncle Had Two Sayings

“When I stop bird eyeing chicks
kick the dirt on me,” &
“If it can’t be fixed with duct tape
it can’t be fixed.”

When he died
they said the usual bullshit:
he was old,
had lived a long & useful life, &
wasn’t it wonderful
he didn’t have to suffer, &
we all want to go like that, &
it was commendable of him
to be so little bother.

& uncle was dead, all right,
because that was the only way
he could have stayed still through their crap,
& because when his big-titted
nieces paraded past the coffin
his eyes didn’t move,
a sure sign he’d passed
the duct tape stage.

My Aunt Bids the World Adieu

“If you want me I’ll be
in the river.”

When I Am Dead

the trees along the edge
of the St. Joseph River
will still be there.
It will be raining
or snowing
or the sun will
shine brightly.
From some distant city
my son will write
to his mother, elsewhere—
“It is months since
we’ve heard from you.
What are you up to?”

Hearing the Landscape Tell the Story

The hills
know themselves only
from the roots that cling
within them,
from the feet that walk
across their lives,
from the shape of the wind
moving from where it comes
to where it goes.

Left Behind

Three Sunday suits
hang empty of him.

Shreds of yellowed lace
like cataracts in the darkened windows.

In the yard, bees
swarm, the ball pulling
down the branch.

At the top of the pasture hill
two mares, head to head,
shadows against the rising moon.

As Time Goes By

the US 31 Drive-In works
its own collapse. The screen leans. Paint peels. Speakers
dangle off posts. Kids from days
of tight pants & tight dreams, we stretched out
under the night sky,
looked for a sign from the stars
like a cosmic lottery.

In the distant present,

men slump alone
in rigs & deeply smoke. Big assed, barrel-chested
cowboys who eat double-fisted, steer
with their knees. Westbound, escaping
bad marriages, bad jobs. Carping on cb's.
I guess, like David Bottoms says,
most things blow off steadily
to the shoulder of the road

& wallow like litter.

But a few remain, hang on
memory, like those unknown connections
we used to credit to the stars.
Having come to what he's come to
in middle age, some trucker will leave
the speaker to dangle

as his foot floors

his stripped-out Ford,
the V-8 squalls under the jumping hood,
& he kicks up gravel & dust speeding
as far as his memory will haul.

Boast

I can talk without
moving my poems.

Hamburgers

Like goats,
people hunger. Everything that lies
in their way, they devour. They cram
into themselves a universe
of hamburgers, cokes, yesterday's
turnovers.

Yet everything remains.
Coming into the Hamtramck Burger Chef,
you see the rows
of boxed burgers, the shake machine, discarded
wrappers and cups, just as they were,
and, tethered in place, people—

innumerable people, all chewing.

Posing

When I was a kid & an Adventist,
we found this stiff
cat behind Burger Chef.
“Okay, cat,” Mark said. “Let’s see
if you’re faking.”
He piled up trash,
soaked the fur.

I threw the match.
Fleas jumped like coins
in a jackpot.
A car with a mother & three screaming kids
jerked to a stop
in front of us.

She hollered some shit
about meanness. What did we know,
stupid white boys
who practiced macho poses
to maybe get a kiss from some mixed-up
girl who kissed everyone.
Our laughs smacked cement.
Back home I slipped through
the side door & down
to my room. I steadied myself
against the sink, my hands squeezing porcelain,
my face a flushed mystery:
we were that cruel to death?

Breaking Down

I bought that car for \$50.

To open the door
you had to pound
just below the handle.

When you turned a corner
the dash lights flickered
like a busted marquee.

The rolling noise
that charmed Vera
was a can of Budweiser
under her seat.

Night we split up,
she held my erection
& looked out the window
like someone
with a hand on a doorknob
stopping to say one last thing
before goodbye.

Even the Dead are Growing Old

She's batfuck for him. The Chevy
crushed him against its forehead
like a can. I know because
she's explaining it to me: how he got a job
shoveling eight hours a day worth of mud,
came home head to toe dirt. How at the Empty Bottle
he promised things would be better this time.
No more pulling his fist out of walls.
How they went for a screw

in his El Camino. I can see
by her eyes she won't let him go.
I don't tell her I knew the guy.
I worked misery whips in Washington
with him on the other end.
Woman he was screwing then
used Maybelline greens, foundation, grape lipstick—
nothing hid the welts, things he'd done to her.
One she wrote FUCK YOU in empty beer cans

across his lawn. Then he flicked his knife
like a match before her eyes.
I'd ask, but I might as well be asking
where the ducks in the park
go in winter. She's one stiff drink.
No time for a mad
backward two-step
into a new game of feisty.



When *No Way Out But In* appeared in 2008, Todd Moore wrote to the author: “Your book is some of the best poetry I’ve seen in years.” Other reviews before and since have borne out this perceptive judgment and established Don Winter as one of the most important writers in the small press.

“One of the small press finest poets.” *Chiron Review*

“Don Winter is one of the best poets in [the] small press.” *Small Press Review*

“I remember getting hit once with a baseball bat right in the middle of the back and the force of the blow spun me around toward a girl who was laughing. Sometimes poetry will have that same effect on me. Reading Tom McGrath’s *Letter to an Imaginary Friend* was like that. Don Winter’s poetry hits me like that.” —Todd Moore

“I admire Don Winter’s poetic courage to bite the bullet of hard killer times while keeping his wise wits about him. I’ve admired his work for years, and so has my husband, the poet Fred Voss.”—Joan Jobe Smith

“The poems of Don Winter have the same strong realistic qualities I find in my favorite narrative writers, e.g. Hemingway, Bukowski, Updike, Roth, and Haslami: recognizable locales, credible characters, sharp dialogue, terse descriptions, and a minimum of authorial intrusion. His collections hold the readers start to finish. Don, thank you for all the good words you’ve graced the readers of your work with.”—Gerald Locklin