

Something For You

Collected Poems, 1927-2003

Dorothy Diemer Hendry

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PREFACE

The title of this lifetime collection of poems expresses my desire that you will find at least a few verses that you recognize as **Something For You.**

As you can see from the dates of these 277 poems, I wrote most of them during college years and retirement years. In between, I was so busy helping my husband, bringing up our children, and teaching English students that I seldom wrote poems. I did, however, write a great deal of prose–letters, lesson plans, professional articles, speeches, reports for the Southern Association and NCATE, sections of the Alabama State Course of Study, teachers' manuals and literature annotations for Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., school and church dramas, television scripts, etc.

Poetry writing isn't my only literary passion. I love being with all of you who are avid readers and interesting writers, and I appreciate your examples and your encouragement. My file folders save heartwarming letters, and my favorite bookshelves hold attractive volumes written by relatives and friends.

Please wish me good luck in completing my historical novel *Looking for Jency,* based on the life of my grandmother Lizzie Casebolt. I hope to live long enough to revise and publish its 55 chapters.

Thank you, dear family and friends, for urging me to dig through my jumbled files to find representative poems of life. May you find herein worthwhile reading– **Something For You.**

Dorothy Diemer Hendry
Huntsville, Alabama
September, 2003

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When we look at the writing of a nine-year-old, we expect a genuine emotion. There's no doubt I loved my mother! In the interest of rhyme, however, I stretched the truth a little. Myrtle Casebolt Diemer (Mrs. George W. Diemer) was not endlessly patient with her children. She knew when to run out of patience and say a few words to correct the error of our ways. I'm glad she liked this verse, which was printed in our J. C. Nichols School paper.

Of All the People

Of all the people in the world,
I love my mother best.
She does her work with ne'er a word.
Her patience stands the test.

She guides her children day by day
And watches as they grow.
Kindness, kisses mend their wounds,
And seeds of love they sow.

Of all the people in the world,
I love my mother best.
She does her work with ne'er a word.
Her patience stands the test.

1931

Here is one of my first rhymes, dating back to the early 1930's. Perhaps you agree that words are not wasted if they start the flow of vivid memories.

Burnished Pebbles

I have a pocketful of stones,
Imperfect, dull, and cold;
But outside in the morning sun
They shine like living gold.

I have a notebook full of rhymes,
Impulsive, simple, trite;
But in the glow of memory
They, too, are rich and bright.

1933

I wrote "The Play" when I was a junior in Southwest High School, Kansas City, Missouri. I remember that Anna Curry, my teacher in a course called "Expression," liked the poem and read it to our class. She also helped me with an oration I wrote–"Napoleon: an Invective." With her coaching, I overcame my timidity and delivered the oration in a school assembly. The applause, of course, was music to my ears–an encouragement to keep on writing and speaking. Teachers who inspire creativity are treasures, aren't they? "The Play" later was published in Western Poetry *and in* Voices.

The Play

I stood before the little stage
Of some unknown great theater
And saw in rapid changing view
A multi-colored brilliancy;
Soft-toned, delightful loveliness;
And clash of wildest startling hues.
I heard in strange confusion songs
Melodious and sweet; loud roars
And shrieks of anger, grief, and mirth;
Deep murmurs of profoundest love.
And suddenly I felt and breathed
Of all the awesome atmosphere–
Then flashed across my mind the truth:
"This is no play, but Life!"

1935

The following quatrain, written about 1935, shows that as a teenager, I had more questions than answers. That continues to be true.

The Only Way

Life should have a definition
Pen or voice could give.
The only way to comprehend it
Is (I think) to live.

In the following verse, written in 1935, I declare my allegiance to my hometown–"the heart of America."

Kansas City

City of fountains and rivers and railroads,
You throb as America's heart,
Vibrantly, forcefully, faithfully pumping
Your vigor to every part.

1935

In the fall of 1935, when I was a college freshman in Miss Emma Serl's English class, Alexander Pope's personality and writing fascinated me. In the following narrative poem about him, I imitated his use of heroic couplets with a sting.

Pope's Day of Judgment

Saint Peter eyed the newest waif of fate
And wondered how the "wasp" had reached the gate.
How strange a little man with sullen hope,
How keen and vain, this doubtful angel Pope!
The saint debated and his visage fell–
A key to Heaven or a boot to Hell?
"Plague on it, Pope, you are a puzzling man:
A part of you I bless and part I ban."
Then spake he further, "Justice loudly cries
That half your sparkling, caustic words are lies,
And yet these other gems bespeak your kind–
That crippled limbs will never genius bind.
Shall I reward your courage with these wings,
Exchange your poems for some golden strings;
Or shall I think you egotist and thief,
Deserving pitch forks, horns, foul spells, and grief?"
Pope simmered, smouldered, snapped, and burst in flame.
He burned the saint in words and thundered shame.
His vanity and courage never failed;
His last words sizzled even though they paled:
"On earth the simple mortals I excused
That they angelic art sometimes abused,
But here your gross misjudgment quickly yields
My freedom for a flight to fairer fields."
The kindly keeper heard the tirade through
And sorrowed that his judgment had been true.
"Don't pity me," cried Pope; "I'm through with you!
I'm off to tell old Satan what to do."

1935

When I wrote "Disloyalty" in 1935, I was reacting to a snub from an erstwhile friend. (Maybe I deserved it.) As you can see, the meter is iambic dimeter. In my teens I experimented with various meters and rhymes.

Disloyalty

Ignore false friends;
Your life is new.
Whom profit they?
Be free, not true.

Exert your strength;
Do some great deed.
There's time to choose
The love you need.

When fame and love
Are in your reach,
You won't regret
That early breach.

It's quite true that pessimists are sometimes pleasantly surprised, and optimists are sometimes disappointed. Despite my full share of disappointments, I prefer looking on the bright side, in keeping with this 1935 quatrain.

Outlook

"Have done with fantasy," they say.
"You ought to write of woe.
The world is bitter, dull, and gray."
I do not find it so!

1935

This 1935 quatrain shows that I could laugh at myself.

Conforming to Pattern

Does every other obscure creature,
Oblivious of fate,
Decide with most amusing ego?–
"Someday I shall be great."

This 1935 verse demonstrates my fondness for alliteration. Probably that's the reason I chose Mars to unmuzzle the "maddened hound."

The Hound of Mars

Unmuzzle, Mars, your maddened hound
That grumbles in the gray.
Let rugged ridge and rock resound
With thunder of his bay.

O bid him bound across the sky
With fiery, frothing mouth
And rend and rip the clouds that lie
Like satin in the south.

Those satin folds that overhang
The poor and parching plain,
Let him attack with lightning fang
To loose the cooling rain.

1935

Here's a poem I wrote in my early teens. Do adults have similar experiences with joy and sorrow?

Joy and Sorrow

Pain and ecstasy are never separate.
The eye burns with the beauty of
sunlight on dancing water.
The ear is painfully attuned to
a crying violin.
The heart aches with the glory of
human love.
Joy has strangely some core of sorrow,
And a bitter day starts the flow of
wistful memories.

1935

Many young people aspire to heroic lives. When I wrote this sonnet in 1935, I must have had this ambition. (My contemporaries and I did accomplish a few things that required courage and unselfishness.) At my present advanced age, I still admire the idealism of the young people I know best–for instance, my children and grandchildren.

Sonnet III
"Surmount the Lonely Bulwarks..."

Surmount the lonely bulwarks of my dream
And wend the singly chartered pathway steep
And rocky to my future. I esteem
Your promised confidence, as still as sleep.
Outside these silent walls my life is sweet,
Prosaic, eventful, loving, rich, and gay.
The friendly world expects my patterned feet
To follow cheerfully the crowded way.
But I would rather scale the frowning wall
And mountain pathway to my soul's demand,
Desiring death in trying, more than all
The peaceful pleasures of the lower land.
My friend, in all humility I pray
That God will heed my words to you this day.

1935

This sonnet, written in 1935, considers whether or not we should want to know the future. What would be your choice?

Sonnet IV

Then you have wished it, too–that you could see
If all your pretty dreams are made of pearls
Or bubbles: if they all too silently
Will break amid their opalescent swirls?
If it were ours to sweep aside at will
The curtains veiling human destiny,
To see beyond our flimsy dreams and still
Our doubts with triumph or futility,
Then we would contemplate this power dread
And pause before the action, thinking long
Of hopes confirmed or blighted–dreaming dead–
And life robbed of its questing, surging song.
Forbid the sight! It carries only tears;
We live for dreams and gently rolling years.

1935

In 2003, a flute virtuoso named Nina Assimakopoulos requested flute compositions inspired by poems. My sister, Emma Lou Diemer, chose a poem I had written at the age of seventeen and used it as the basis of a flute composition. Nina expressed enthusiasm for both. She is preparing a CD that presents the reading of each poem followed by the flute music it inspired.

Indian Flute

Wind sigh... loon cry...
Wail of the Indian flute...
Only her lonely
Heart is forever mute.

All night blue light
Trembles upon the lagoon,
Water of slaughter
Dark with his blood at noon.

Her chill heart's still,
Voiceless— and yet acute
To wind sigh... loon cry...
Wail of the Indian flute.

1935

In 1935, influenced by Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass, I wrote a free verse poem on the subject of "Instinct." When I ran across a copy in 1997, I decided to write a sequel. The two-part poem won a first honorable mention in the 1997 letters competition of the Alabama State Association of the National League of American Pen Women.

Instinct

I. Written in 1935

Give me the intoxicating sun in glowing richness
and the earthy fields—for I have need of them.
Give me time, needless of reckoning,
and leisure, needless of cessation.

I would damn the stench of slaughter houses
and glorify the fragrance of a rose.
I would disregard the meaner despots of propriety
and loose my tongue in honest talk for once with people.

I want a burning sword to smite the slavers of this world
and cleave the evil chains of cruelty and greed.
Then will I bind my pagan heart to Mountains,
Love, Simplicity, and Universal Music.

II. Written in 1997

God knows I am *not* ashamed of words I wrote at seventeen.
It is not wrong at any age to revel in Sun and Earth and bountiful Time,
to reverence our companion animals and plants,
and to seek—with compassion—a Spirit of Truth among people.

By God's grace, I am still one of his swordsmen, sharing salty tears of defeat, yet
hoping to shout, "Free at last!"
Be it ever the laughter of God in "my pagan heart" bonded to Mountains, Love,
Simplicity, and Universal Music!

1935

In 1935-1936 when I was a college freshman, I enjoyed the privilege of working with upperclassmen to edit Voices, the magazine edition of the Teachers College Scout, Kansas City, Missouri. Louise Abney was our faculty adviser. Here is one of the poems chosen for publication.

Anger

Rushing down the piny slopes to strike the briny sea,
Tumbling over snowy quartz to splash the stony quay,
Roaring through the rugged vale to drown the sandy bar,
Frothing on the jutting rocks to pound the cliffs afar,
Surging from the sun-flamed snows to freeze and burn the bay,
The stormy river ever sweeps its devastating way.
Intent to fight the nearing ocean, on it madly raves
Until it loses harmless self in all the smiling waves.

In the 1930's my mentors made helpful suggestions and encouraged me to keep on writing. Among these generous people were Anna Curry, an expression teacher at Southwest High School, Kansas City, Missouri; Louise Abney, a poet and speech teacher at the Kansas City Teachers College; Virginia Scott Minor, a family friend and poet in Kansas City; John G. Neihardt , a college lecturer and Missouri poet renowned for his volumes of Indian lore; and, most of all, my family. I experimented with various meters and rhyme patterns, including internal rhymes, as in "Interlude," written about 1936. Is it better to bend a thought to fit a pattern or to discard the pattern to concentrate on thought?

Interlude

Moonlight sifts through nebulous rifts
in a restless sky tonight.
Wind slips by with a gentle sigh
in a hurried, aimless flight.

Breakers roar on a faraway shore
with incessantly surging sound.
Grasses bend, and branches distend
their lengths on the moonlit ground.

Part of sky and wind am I
and part of the earth and sea.
Strange it seems that even in dreams
I have never before felt free.

Free from thrall and blending with all,
I sense the pulsing whole.
No grace may compare with being aware
of a disembodied soul.

This present mood is an interlude
in perplexing thoughts and strife,
But my last breath shall be prayer that death
will begin this mightier life.

1936

In my teens I experimented with various rhyme schemes, including internal rhyme. The speaker in the poem below is a romantic young man who addresses himself to a pretty gypsy girl. The poem was published in Voices in 1936.

To a Gypsy

Light as the breeze in the moonlit trees,
Dark as the velvet night,
Wild as the waves in the cold sea caves,
Free as a fancy's flight,

You paused in the vale down the dipping trail
To sing to the lingering moon;
And I thought I dreamed of a maiden who seemed
A goddess of lilting tune.

Not knowing me there, you tossed your black hair
And won with your dark eyes' art
My longing cry, which you heard with a sigh
And fled with the moon–and my heart.

1936

Suddenly we realize childhood has ended, and we must face the uncertainties of adult life. I wrote this verse in 1936.

Time

What softly steals away from me–
The best-loved hours of my brief day
Upon this earth? O stay, please stay,
Kind childhood! Longer, longer be!

Why did I not value more
Your gifts so simple, yet so rare?
Life–eager, pulsing, thrilling, fair,
And strange–don't leave me, I implore.

Although in 1993 I am eighty-five years and counting, I agree with the main idea of this verse, which I wrote on my eighteenth birthday.

On Being Eighteen
(April 11, 1936)

Throngs of poignant, sweet impressions
on which memory thrives
Whisper I have lived not eighteen
years but eighteen lives.
Floods of stirring, lovely dreams
toward which ambition strives
Murmur I should live not eighty
years but eighty lives.

1936

This is a quatrain from my teens. Often we see the problem but fail to solve it.

Loneliness

Both were starved to know another,
Feeling empty, pained, and tight,
But dreaded so to feel a slight
That when they met they snubbed each other.

I remember that many of my adolescent days were filled with the gaiety of friends and family. "Changing the Weather," written in 1936, confirms that memory.

Changing the Weather

I like the laugh that lingers in the winter air,
For merry friends can melt a frost that tarries there.

I like the smiles that brighten grayest foggy days,
For they quite easily dissolve the gloomy haze.

I like a lilting voice at breezeless summer noon,
For it can stir the heartstrings to sweet trembling tune.

1936

This lighthearted verse, written in 1936, expresses a certain feeling all of us have had.

April Song

With exultation born of youth and dreams,
I laud the leafing trees and flooding streams,
The wildly blowing wind and fragrant rain,
And heed the bidding of a fresh refrain:

"Lassie, love the buds of spring;
Lift your voice and blithely sing
Of lightsome weather April brings,
Of lilacs, robins, simple things."

Quatrains, such as this one from 1936, are fun to write. It seems, however, that I like adjectives too much. Blame it on misty fancy.

Mist

A dusky drink, a rosebud sips.
Leaving fragrance from her lips
In gray-blue bowls of lilac-kissed,
Sweet, wet, warm, pure, soft May mist.

1936

This verse, written in 1936, might be called a lullaby for a person of any age.

Night Thoughts

Sleep, caress like music.
Smooth my niggling cares away.
Lull in peace my simple longings
Till another lively day.

Dreams, approach me softly.
Linger peacefully and still.
Leave a finer, fresher courage
And a firm, unselfish will.

Life, forgive my blunders.
May they cause no one to weep.
Strengthen me for every dawning.
Suffer not eternal sleep.

This verse is a plain and sincere prayer on a favorite American holiday.

On Thanksgiving, 1936

Dear God, your mercy blesses
My everyday affairs,
And on this glad Thanksgiving,
I pray my thankful prayers,

For You have kept from sorrow
A sinner in the shrine
Of gracious, happy living,
This loving home of mine.

Dear God, please guide my groping,
For all my life depends
On making my acts worthy
Of You and home and friends.

1936

This verse (1936) contrasts bleak mountain imagery with the familiar setting of the Twenty-third Psalm.

Valley of the Shadow

Past timberline,
The grassy chine,
And last gaunt pine,

A withered crone
Makes empty moan–
Wind-sough on stone.

This sighing breath,
This crying breath
Is not of Death,

For through a vale
We find the Grail
And Shepherd's dale.

1936

In a pensive mood we may contrast the enormity of time with the brevity of life, as in this 1936 verse.

Sparks

Still this vast engulfing darkness
Without whisper, without murmur
Rolls in deep majestic torrents
Through untold eternities
Until our pale and minute flickers
Tremble for a second and are gone.

1936

Although I wrote "Realization" in my teens (about 1936), it describes the way I feel now about the death of someone I love.

Realization

I listen while my heart is pounding,
pain in every beat,
But existent stillness mocks my
prayer for nearing feet.

I stare until my straining eyes are
blinded, hot, and dry,
But happy strangers on the street
pass unheeding by.

I murmur dearest names until I
break into a shout,
But no answering echo soothes
away one shuddering doubt.

"My faith is deathless!" I cry wildly
to my dead friend's hall,
But only silence answers this most
fervent prayer of all.

Why is it more difficult to write about happy days than about sad and troubled times? I have more good snapshots than poems about swimming parties with friends and family. In this verse (1936) I went overboard with alliteration and rhyme, didn't I?

Spring Frolic

Laugh with a lilt in the light of the dawn,
Love the sunny lea,
Merry and mad as the melody of
Streamlets to the sea.

Barefooted, gracefully run in the breeze,
Run on verdant grass.
She who is last to the glistening pool
Is the laziest lass.

Under the ripples, through crystalline depths,
Pebbles glint and glow.
Swim in the coolest and clearest of springs,
Laughing as we go.

Holiday frolicking, song in the sun,
Dancing in balmy air–
Doubtlessly maidens were never before
Half so debonair!

1936

This verse, written in 1936, is an extravagant tribute, but I greatly admired friends then, and I do now.

To My Friends

If any bygone ages boasted girls like you,
Then weak is every picture master artists drew;
Not any greatest song has one sufficient note,
And flimsy are the tributes gifted poets wrote.

1936

It has always been my good fortune to have relatives and friends with beautiful singing voices. This prose-poem, written in 1936, is a tribute to every one of them. I still feel this way when I hear fine singers, but if I were writing about them now, I might not be so lavish with musical terms.

Appreciation

Your voice is not the kind that brings men to their feet shouting "Bravo!" but the kind that enters dull ears with a subtlety mistaken for mediocrity, and appreciative ears with a whimsical beauty too exquisitely stirring for applause.

Your every mood finds me acutely sympathetic. My mind flies quickly with your notes of onrushing brilliance–allegro con brio–and burns white with measures of dazzling inspiration–con fucco. My soul is soothed by a peaceful song–andante cantabile–sung sweetly–dolce–drifting into a majestic and solemn anthem–maestoso and grave. My heart is demanded by a bit of mockery–scherzo,–captured by a whimsey–con tenerezza,–and enslaved by a promise of intense feeling–appassionata. As your song ends, my dreams fade–morendo,–but my loving admiration lives–sempre.

1936

One of the many fine works of art in Kansas City, Missouri, is a bronze statue of an Indian scout. Astride his horse, he is looking out from a high point in Penn Valley Park. Three hundred years ago, an Indian scout might have been looking for a herd of buffalo or a hostile tribe. The statue, however, looks out on the traffic and smoke of a great metropolis. I wrote "To the Scout" in 1936.

To the Scout

Bronze scout, are you mourning silently
Your brother red-men lying in the graves
My people gave them, conquering your land
In dauntless, hardy, strong invading waves?

You hold your hand above your eyes as if
To shield them from the burning noonday sun
Or else to hide in them a fiercer gleam
Of futile hatred for the evil done.

Astride your tireless horse, watch ceaselessly
Our progress in this city robbed from you,
And yet in your proud heart may dimmer grow
Regret and hate and malice–all our due.

1936

Written in 1936, this verse shows that occasionally I, like other shy teenagers, fled away from society. But at any age don't we sometimes need to get away from the hurly-burly?

Escape

Like the moonlit forest streams,
Darkly shine my untold dreams.
Quiet musing dimly gleams–
Mingling fire and piety.

Childish wonder sadly meets
Many cynical defeats.
Love a burning heartache greets–
My intense variety.

Grasping crowds, unknowing, rife
My resplendent thoughts of life.
Sometimes I escape the strife–
Flee its notoriety.

Breathless on a storm-swept shore,
Laughing in the wind and roar,
I love dashing sea spray for
Its half-mad society.

1937

In 1937 I was co-editor with a friend named Dorothea Ozar of Voices, a college anthology of poetry and prose. Our faculty adviser was Louise Abney. The Kansas City Star reviewed our magazine favorably and quoted the verse below. Although I wrote it tongue-in-cheek, I must say I'm proud of the good lives and accomplishments of my classmates. Their voices have indeed been heard.

Prelude to "Voices"

We are the youthful dabblers,
Implicitly sure of fame.
If doggerel be our zenith,
We've none but ourselves to blame.

Behold our impressive subjects:
Love and despair and death.
Quite ignorant of their meaning,
We dedicate novice breath.

Revolution incites our allegiance–
Oh, we will reform this old earth!
With eloquence, insight, and courage,
We pledge to give Virtue rebirth.

Reader, you laugh at our vaunting?
But my fellows are poets in truth.
So ludicrous think you these fancies–
These themes and the battles of youth?

But Byron subsisted on ego,
And Milton used grandiose themes,
Young Shelley was idealistic.
Let Fate deal with us and our dreams.

1937

When I was a teenager, we took care of a home aquarium of tropical fish. I thought that the word "guppy" was pronounced to rhyme with "snoopy." I wrote two poems about these fish. Both were published in our college newspaper, and the "Sonnet to a Guppy" was published in our magazine Voices in 1937. My classmates pleased me by laughing at the humor of the guppy father and son.

Sonnet to a Guppy

Ignore my mocking eyes, young flippant fish.
Be freezing cold to anyone so snoopy,
But really you make quite a pretty dish,
And so I write a sonnet to you, guppy.
Undaunted fellow, sail undaunted on.
As hours go by, the silver depths unroll.
How many miles canst proudly boast at dawn–
Around a so absurdly little bowl?
A lightning grace enchants your sudden darts,
A peerless rainbow sheathes your streamlined form,
And yet your ego comes not from these arts,
But from the non-existent goal you storm.
For all my words, I fear my searching soul
Is like a crazy guppy in a bowl!

Guppy, Junior: a Sequel

Poor fish! Thy late handsome father
Swam in this same irised bowl.
He was an infamous fellow
Cursed with a hurricane soul.

Lightly he leaped like lithe lightning,
Roguishly ripping around.
Finishing guileless but gill-less,
Breathe he could not, and he drowned.

Why with a pitiful ego
Sought he a mythical goal?
Guppy, thy father was foolish–
Circling forever that bowl.

Junior, you're not like your papa.
You are quite lazy–oh, tish!
'Tis better to storm unavailing
Than be an indolent fish!

1937

Like many adolescent writers, I sometimes tried to imitate the language of Elizabethan literature. This sonnet was published in Western Poetry and Voices in 1937.

To a Singing Cardinal

If thou didst know, my unconcerned friend,
Thy charming ways are earning thee a sonnet,
Methinks thou wouldst not even pause to tend
A nod from thy uptilted crimson bonnet.
The grace that speeds this fragment of an hour
Deserts the dewless garden of the day;
So, mindful of thy fragrant lilac bower,
Thou'd shun my sonnet for thy sweeter lay.
O wise, blithe redbird, art thou to deny
A pause in any cadence which thou sings.
Ere long, Apollo drives his chargers by
And bids thee work on gallant, graceful wings.
I, too, friend, tarry singing moments here
In peace unbroken while our day rides near.

1937

This poem was published in Voices, Kansas City, Missouri, 1937.

Wind in the Willow

Sobbingly, sobbingly,
Wind in the willow,
Bitterly, bitterly,
Buffet and billow.

Cry like a lonely child,
Lost and forgotten.
Beat on that drooping tree,
Sagging and rotten.

Where has your monarch gone,
You that would laud her?
Where is June's tender grace,
Wild night marauder?

Gone are your gentle ways,
Wistful and sighing.
Now you are shrieking mad,
Wailing and crying.

Capture my broken heart,
Lonely and lost, too.
Into the raging sea,
Carry it with you.

1937

This poem, written in the late 1930's, is about a nature trail in Swope Park, Kansas City, Missouri. The trail was named in honor of the naturalist Albert E. Shirling, a valued friend of the Diemer family.

The Shirling Trail

This is more than a trail through the woods,
more than a footfall in the snow and the abode of quietness,
more than hawthorn blooms aglow in spring
or green arches of old elms soaring in summer
or sumacs and maples blazing on an autumn glory road.

We learned to walk as *he* walked here:
feet sensitive to earth, first swift, then slow,
eyes keen for a flower, a leaf, a bee,
ears tuned to a thrush singing far and low.

This is more than a trail through the woods.
It is a legacy of friendship blessed with understanding.
It is a way of life—of wonder and eternal quest.

1937

This verse, written about 1937, has an interesting rhyme scheme.

Music

Song–
Clear and new,
Gentle and compelling,
Stirring all the soul of me,
Really sung too perfectly
For my simple telling–
I to you
Belong.

1937

In 1937 when I wrote "To Youth," I felt the influence of great writers' personalities and works, and I hoped my contemporaries would succeed in their endeavors. (They did, in one way or another!) Looking back at this verse, I note clumsiness and naivete, but also intensity of youthful emotion.

To Youth

Touch thy heart's own vibrant string
And sing, ye youthful minstrel, sing!
Strange is music, wondrous strange
In such a stirring, startling range.

Pleasure is thy zenith, youth.
Thy matchless middle song is truth.
Sorrow plunges not too deep,
But love arouses depths from sleep.

Dare to risk your golden hoard
And gamble for a perfect chord.
Make thy very life the wager,
Transposing minor into major.

Deeper tones are lonely grieving,
Though undaunted, still believing;
Blacker strains, a poignant sorrow,
Yet suggesting light tomorrow.

Last, O youth, a mellow song–
"Love me little, love me long."
Play not brilliant, crashing themes,
But your deepest living dreams.

Touch thy heart's own vibrant string.
Ere it breaks, ye minstrel, sing!
Thus when heart and string are dust,
Your songs will linger on–O trust!

In 1937 I wrote this verse considering an interesting aspect of physics and metaphysics.

Logic

A buried man not long retains a name,
But molders to the dust from whence he came;
Yet never flame nor sun nor flood nor gust
Obliterates those particles of dust.

While time effaces records of his life,
Eternity does not consign to murk
His body: it becomes once more of worth
In fields of fragrant bloom from moldy earth.

Always Nature finds a use anew
For elements that with a life are through;
Beauty shines incessantly for man
Because she lives and dies and lives again.

Do you suppose that dust blown from a shoal
Would long exist–and not the priceless soul?

1937

Joan of Arc has been variously characterized in history, biography, fiction, drama, and religious texts. What is the truth about her? A possible answer is in this verse, written in 1937.

Saint?

Joan of Arc, tell us forsooth
Of all they cry,
Of all they sigh,
How much is truth
And how much lie?

Were you a lass who made a feint
Successfully
For history?
Or were you saint
In honesty?

We do not doubt you loved your France
And won her cause...
Here let us pause.
In such romance
Why look for flaws?

With body wrapped in fires of hate,
You prayed anew.
The halo due
Has come too late,
But wear it, too.

You were a maiden–ardent, whole,
And fair of face.
We humbly place
Your pristine soul
With God...and grace.

1937

This verse , scribbled in a weak moment in 1937, is distressing because of forced rhyme, stilted language, and an all-too-obvious moral. Although you will find these same faults in other verses of mine, I hope you will find a few poems to like.

Almost Inseparable

Squalid and ugly, the old city dump
Seemed like a devil's repose
Till mindlessly lovely and fragrant there grew
Up from the filth a wild rose.

"Far, far too lovely to bloom here," I said,
Is this frail, exquisite bud."
I thoughtlessly reached for the thorny green stem
And felt on my hand only blood.

Ruefully feeling the bothersome pricks,
I looked at my scratched, throbbing hand
And saw it adorned by three deep lucent gems–
A remarkable ruby-red strand.

Since this small incident each day has proved
A truth which I long tried to hide:
That often a failure must greet the attempt
Beauty and ill to divide.

1937

My parents, twin brothers, sister, and I took family camping trips from our home in Missouri to the Rocky Mountains, Yellowstone Park, and other wilderness places. Since I was predisposed to the pleasures of camping, I was glad to serve for several summers as a counselor in Camp Pin Oak, a Girl Scout camp on the Lake of the Ozarks. I wrote "Wish for Campers" in 1937.

Wish for Campers

May all who come to our retreat
Discover beauties we have seen
In sky and lake and wooded hills–
This world of gold and blue and green.

May others feel cool wind, hot sun,
Fresh sweep of rain, and warmth of fire;
May others hear the lapping waves,
The singing breeze, the forest choir.

And may they learn as we have learned
When on these woodland paths we trod,
A vital joy in comradeship,
A loving reverence for God.

1937

After giving a lecture and reading at our college in Warrensburg, Missouri, in 1937, the eminent poet John G. Neihardt visited in our home. My parents, Mr. and Mrs. George W. Diemer, gave him some of my early poems and prose-poems. Neihardt later wrote me an encouraging letter, saying that he thought I had been born with poetic insight. (Isn't this true of yourself and many people we know?) Here are two of the prose-poems that Mr. Neihardt liked.

Infinity

It was a moment between darkness and darkness–life and life. Creation was revealed to a soul that had just died and was soon to be born again. "How simple!" the soul exclaimed when it saw and understood the universe. "How happily and unmistakably simple!" And then the soul entered life again and thence found the universe dark and complicated.

The writing of prose-poems freed me from the strictures of meter and rhyme, which I assumed poems should have. The following prose-poem considers the happenstance of historical records. For example, don't we wish we had more than a few scraps of Sappho's poetry–or many more of the exact words Jesus spoke to his listeners?

A Man Tries

Time is a monster who grabs the golden and black pages of a man's life as they are written until the last words are haltingly penned. The monster has no further use for the pages or for him when there are no more of them to be stolen. They are blown about and mayhap buried... mayhap forgotten. But perhaps some faded scrap drifts into a gentle hand and is read...and is not forgotten...and is History–scoffer of Time.

1937

After watching meteor showers on an August night in 1937, I wrote this poem.

Star Shower

A glittering starry shower
Fell silently down the sky.
The sapphire and silver fragments
In meteor coldness lie.

My dream was a starry fragment
That tumbled to earth a clod,
And all of my soul remembers
That shimmering smooth glissade.

1937

Before the onset of Dutch elm disease, we prized the American elm as the grandest of trees. Here is an elm poem I wrote in 1937.

Elm Tree in Winter

Naked in the cold, the elm tree stood last night.
Clinging leaves, a sorry handful, brown and stiff,
Rattled in the wind which swept her on the cliff,
Calling forth our pity for her dismal plight.

Lifting her bare branches toward the darkened sky,
She besought a light to soften her grim lines,
But from stormy clouds there came no hopeful signs.
Not a single star was glimmering on high.

Like a dazzling queen, the elm tree stands at morn
Cloaked in finest ermine ever earthly worn.
Jewel fires of ice her sunlit arms adorn–
Diamonds, sapphires, rubies in mid-winter born.

1937

This quatrain, written in 1937, comments on the change time may bring to a boy-girl relationship.

Lecture

Smile, if you are wise,
On her adoring eyes.
Else she might grow colder
When both of you are older.

1938

This silly verse was written about 1938. Though not Polyanna, I'm an optimist (except in politics).

To an Ultra-Optimist

If gas burned out
And lights should fail,
And phones were dead and still;
If tombs should shout
And people ail
With you abed and ill;

If love should die
And hate should freeze,
And friendship pale and rot;
If art should lie
And music wheeze,
And writers wail a lot;

If the moon should sink
And stars should fall
And thunder peal and knock;
If the sun should blink
And planets stall,
And the heavens reel and rock–

Polyanna, would you–still–
With calmness in your face
Ask me why I dare presume
This is no perfect place?

1938

This verse, written in 1938, leans heavily on two adjectives, doesn't it?

Dawn and Dusk

The dawn was a golden madness–
Gold clouds, gold hills, gold leas.
Gold birds in exuberant gladness
Were singing in golden trees.

The dusk is a graying drabness–
Gray clouds, gray hills, gray leas.
Gray birds with an infinite sadness
Are crying from dim gray trees.

1935

During my teenage years, our family spent summers in the Rocky Mountains, where trees of the timberline impressed us.. My father, George W. Diemer, Central Missouri State president, liked this poem and read it sometimes in high school commencement addresses. My parents printed it in a Christmas card with appropriate drawings.

Timberline Trees

Down in the valleys blue spruces enhance
The shimmering green of the aspen trees' dance.
Up in the mountains the lodge-poles stand straight,
Proud to be handsome and proud to be great.
High on the summit and nobler than these
Bend the disfigured old timberline trees.

Weighted by snow and beaten by hail,
Seared by the lightning and lashed by the gale,
Rooting in crevices, breaking the stone,
They live for centuries, rugged and lone.
Sometimes in calmness of moonlight they kneel,
Arms to the heavens in holy appeal.

Trees of the timberline, teach me your might,
Strength to live bravely on some lonely height.
Teach me your strength, but humility, too;
I would be valiant and humble like you.
I would bow down on the rocks and the sod,
High on the mountains and nearest to God.

1938

While writing a history of our college in Warrensburg, Missouri, in 1938, I looked at hundreds of pictures of students and faculty members of former times. Their eyes said so much to me that I had to write this prose-poem.

Eyes

I cannot glance through an old book of photographs without being haunted by eyes–luminous eyes, sparkling eyes, limpid eyes, dreaming eyes, laughing eyes, questioning eyes, searching eyes, ingenuous eyes, quiet eyes, intelligent eyes, fearless eyes, reckless eyes, and hopeful eyes. A terrific personality impact compresses my heart, and in the space of a minute I sense something of the meaning of those expressive eyes. I feel a little ashamed because it seems almost as if souls are bared. What happened to all of those eyes as their owners grew older? Did they become hard, cold, indifferent, fearful, guilty, gloomy, or hurt? Did some of them assume greatness and strength, mellow beauty, wise twinkling, and deep human understanding? And what happened–O please tell me what happened!–to the souls that looked out of those eyes before they shut forever.

In 1938 I wrote a history of CMSTC (now Central Missouri State University) for our yearbook, the Rhetor. One of the facts I unearthed was that in the 1870's a pump stood in the middle of the quadrangle. Students refreshed themselves between classes by drinking from the long-handled dipper.

The Campus Pump

You must have hurried to the campus pump
in springtime after games or class
athirst for water as for being.
You made the handle creak and thump
till sparkling showers drenched the grass
and you drank deeply—tasting, seeing.

You looked at young leaves on Old Elm,
sun streaming down a sandstone wall,
and bright on blue the flag upsurging.
A honey-locust seemed to whelm
a thrush's song and student's call—
the scent, the light, the music merging.

Perhaps you thought this whimsey: School
is but a pump we use in youth
and teachers know the art of priming.
We draw from some eternal pool
and freshened by a cup of truth
have strength for living and for climbing.

1938

I wrote this sonnet in 1938. In 1999 it won a second place award in the fall contest of the Alabama State Poetry Society. In 2000 Emma Lou Diemer, my sister, set it to music for voice and piano.

Sonnet 25

All things that I have loved–where are they now?
A few have lingered in my sight and hearing:
My sister's hands, this flute, that apple bough,
Those hummingbirds are beauties still endearing.
And others charm my more reflective mind:
A bit of art, a line of verse, a motto,
A smell of pines, a draught of salt sea wind,
A heron's call, a cello's deep vibrato.
But how shall I account for lovely things
Too long since past for sight or memories,
White ships that bore me fast with love's great wings–
Are they now derelicts of midnight seas?
O fool! Though of my sight and mind small part,
All beauties past have havened in my heart.

1938

A pleasant advantage of living in the college president's home in Warrensburg, Missouri, was the lily pool in the rose garden. I wrote this verse while seated on a bench by the pool one summer morning in 1938.

Water Lilies

Dewy lilies in a limpid pool
In the quiet purple dawning
Tenderly unfold, serenely cool.

Through silver poplar leaves the rising sun
Spins and lifts away the dew-threads,
Leaving lilies richly, whitely spun.

Blue-winged devil's darning needles skim
Green wax pads on shining water.
Underneath, the lazy goldfish swim.

Hotter sunbeams find the flowers gone.
Green buds laving in cool water
Promise lilies for another dawn.

1938

In the summer of 1938, I worked in the Association Camp, Estes Park, Colorado. On days off, my fellow college students and I climbed Long's Peak and other mountains or hiked many miles to scenic places such as Bear Lake and Lake Haiyaha. This song-poem tells my feelings.

Song of the Campfire

I.

Remember pines around a lake,
A clouded moon and sky,
The tumbled boulders of the shore,
And mountains towering high?
We sensed the strength of all we saw,
The might and mystery;
We felt humility and awe;
We felt serenity.

Chorus

For there's nothing like a campfire
To glorify a night
And cast a living warmness
With beauty of its light.
So where a campfire's burning,
There peaceful is the view,
And when a campfire's glowing,
A friendship's glowing, too.

II.

Remember how we watched the sky
And saw the sunlight fall
Upon the rugged slopes we climbed
On Lake Haiyaha trail?
The night grew beautiful but dark;
The wind, pine-spiced but chill;
So by the lake we built a fire
And shared its warm good-will. *Chorus*

III.

That hour has left a memory
Of mountain majesties,
Of cold cascades and ageless peaks
And lakes and lordly trees,
And centered in the memory,
A magic campfire gleams
To warm our reminiscing minds
And light our wistful dreams. *Chorus*

1938

Being the kind of person now called a "tree-hugger," I have written numerous tree poems, such as this one from 1938.

Leaves in Summer

Restlessly the youthful leaves
Strain in the gypsy wind,
Tugging against their moorings,
Stems too securely pinned.

They envy the swallows soaring
In the dusty blue of the sky.
They envy a truant leaflet
Gliding and whirling by.

But they must await October,
Changing their green to rust,
Then tear from the somber branches
And dance till they dance to dust.

1938

Like most other people (not necessarily writers of verse), I respond to the special appeals of each season. I wrote the following on a fall day in 1938.

The Appeal of Autumn

If ever I should watch the golden sun
Send golden ripples down the grain
And smile into the asters' golden eyes
And burnish pebbles on the lane;

If ever I should see the restless stir
Of scarlet leaves upon the trees
And hear their voices echoed lightly by
Their cousins dancing in the breeze;

If ever I should feel the tingling breath
Of stimulating autumn air
Redolent both of artistry of frost
And glowing hearth-fires everywhere;

If ever I should know these matchless things
And hail them not with raptured thought–
Then strangely, bleakly, darkly, I would say,
"The value of my life is nought."

1938

This romantic lyric, written in 1938, has been set to music for voice and piano by Emma Lou Diemer.

Should Our Breathing Cease...

Should our breathing cease tomorrow
(Lest we be apart–strange sorrow)
Scatter all this dust we borrow
In sweet moors among the heather.

Not in lonely caskets bury
My still heart and gentle Larry.
Give us to a flame and very
Golden, fair, and lovesome weather.

Our two souls that none can sever
Shall abide in love forever,
Smiling that our earth dust never
Fails to grow in flowers together.

1938

"Sleep," written in 1938, is a prose-poem about an experience common to all of us.

Sleep

Sleep is a voyage in a cloud ship. "Goodnight!" we say to each other, knowing that for a few hours we will be travelers as far apart as if centuries and light years were lying between us. The ship glides from the harbor into a gentle sea of sweet, cool air. Each of us sees a thousand towns of dreams. Some of them are ugly, some prosaic, and some golden. The ship bucks savage storms and rises above them into the calm ether of space. Space engulfs the cloud ship; measures of time and distance are obliterated; and we lose our identities in the perfect unity of all. But the cloud ship gradually retraces its course–it rediscovers its individuality, deserts the great blue realm, fights the angry tempests, and drifts over the towns of dreams. In our rooms once more, we open our clear eyes, say "Good morning!" and wonder why we feel a bit reluctant to awake.

As this 1938 verse shows, the natural world impresses me strongly.

Simple Faith

My religion flies the sky
And digs the spongy turf.
It haunts the clouds and mountain tops
And skims the foaming surf.

The world is full of voices for
The human heart to heed.
They sing of will, of trust, of love–
And furnish me a creed.

The following quatrain comments on our polite or timid restraint.

Conventionality

Feelings are incessant and
Incessantly repressed.
Exquisite emotions are
Incongruously dressed.

1938

As this 1938 poem shows, a young person who acts cool and casual may be concealing true feelings.

Sophistication

I boast a polished diamond shell
Above a young and pensive heart,
And every cold and sullen spell
Enfolds warm feelings friends impart.

Whatever love I inward feel
Seems almost heartless when expressed
Although strong impulse might reveal
Incessant turmoil in my breast.

When I am thought blase and suave,
My true emotions swirl within,
But outwardly I play the knave,
Loath to acknowledge them as kin.

O someday Love will wield his sword
And cleave my polished shell in twain,
Exposing truth, the daring lord.
Will that be happiness or pain?

1938

Like our dreams in the night, ideas come unbidden. I had never seen cotton fields when I wrote this verse in 1938. Having moved to Alabama in 1962, we now live with cotton fields all around us.

Boll Weevil

When malignant forces
Press hard against the soul,
It shrivels and it darkens
Like a blighted cotton boll.

When benignant sources
Shine with blessed light
And heal the soul's distresses,
It opens pure and white.

1938

We have heard it said that in Elizabethan times the English language reached its summit of eloquence and beauty. Perhaps we can forgive each other for trying now and then to imitate Elizabethan forms and themes, as in this verse, written in 1938.

Inconstancy

O dearest, you would hate
To breathe monotony!
Say, "I shall live by love,
By love's inconstancy."

Love fluctuates, you say?
You choose to live by duty–
More permanent than love?
Nay, therein lies its beauty.

How long lasts a sunset?
Do stars have repose?
Why flyeth the nightwind?
Why fadeth the rose?

Oh, love is inconstant,
Yet love never dies.
Oh, love is worth sadness
For joy to surprise.

When love groweth frigid,
When love seemeth cold,
How brilliant the morning
Love flames as of old!

1938

Central Missouri State University, Warrensburg, safeguards and exhibits the Don Essig collection of old musical instruments. My brother George Diemer was a member of the Essig Troupe, which played the ancient instruments in local concerts and on national radio. Here is my revision of a verse I first wrote in 1938.

Old Lute

Where are the singers of times past?
Do they to soundless tombs belong?
If you would play, they might awake
And sing enchanted with your song.

Today new strident instruments
Drown out your loveliest of tones,
But for your sake, we will repress
Their syncopated shrieks and moans.

Old lute, you dulcet instrument,
Play softly to our jaded souls,
For like a wind on dying fire,
You fan a leaping flame from coals.

1938

"Definition" is a hopeful poem penned in 1938.

Definition

Death is a continuing of life,
A preparation for a nobler strife,
A test of stuff of which the soul is made,
A fit time to replace the limbs that fade,
A welcome gift of rest to those who tire,
A chance to win another fine desire,
A new road to the stumbling–up above–
For valuating truth and life and love.

When I wrote the following prose-poem, I was impressed, as most people are, by the mysteries of death. Now I must add that it doesn't necessarily happen as tranquilly as this writing suggests.

Death

A feather, however smoothly and slowly it glides downward through motionless air, must alight at last, suddenly still. And so does life ebb from a dying man–smoothly...gently...slowly...and cessation, though hardly perceptible, is yet abrupt.

1939

I really did write this poem by moonlight on the lawn in front of our home in Warrensburg, Missouri. It was printed in Columbia Poetry, 1941, Columbia University Press, New York. Emma Lou Diemer set it to music for voice and piano.

Written by Moonlight

I lie in the coolness of grass and the fragrance of clover.
I look through the spaces between the leaves–
The leaves black and soft and the leaves silver-stiff
and shining.
The clouds are like faraway mountains, plains, lakes,
canyons, seas– very remote and unpeopled.
The calm face of the high sovereign moon appears;
The stars, too great to have to show their strength
and size,
Shine silently centuries away;
And space beyond stretches forever past billions of
invisible stars. . .
A firefly, a tiny spark, glows near me.
Suddenly I am back to earth and thinking of myself.
Such is my human conceit that even the stars are
as fireflies.

1939

Editors of Spring Flight, published by the English Club of Central Missouri State Teachers College, Warrensburg, Missouri, announced that I had won first place in their poetry contest, April, 1939. They printed four of my poems, including "A Thousand Violins." An interesting aspect of student writing is that the student sincerely believes he/she is being original, but older readers may recognize outworn and overstated material.

A Thousand Violins

A certain theme in Schubert
Needs a thousand violins,
Needs a thousand holy fiddles,
For its melody begins
As sweetly and as proudly
As if angel hosts above
Had enjoined the purest strings to
Sing of universal love.

I heard just twenty fiddles,
And the twenty violins
Lifted high my raptured feelings,
Tore away my selfish sins.
I think I still would listen
To the glory of that strain
Though a thousand violins were
Bringing too ecstatic pain.

At the advanced age of eighty-five, I like to read again verses of my youth, like this one, first written in 1939 and later revised. Looking past cliches and stilted language, I am glad to find a genuine mountain-top feeling.

Reverence

We climbed to Flagstaff's high and rugged peak
One mystic night of pine-spice-laden June,
Of deeply shadowed crags and ragged trees,
Of fragile clouds adrift and slender moon.
We rested on a rock and caught our breath.
A wind our cheeks caressed and loose hair tossed.
We recognized the perfect place and time
For inspiration, never to be lost.

Not feeling very far from Heaven, we
Looked up to see angelic lanterns rise,
Looked down at friendly lights of distant towns,
And breathed a night bequeathed by Paradise.
Above the tumult of our daily lives,
Above the toilsome trail our feet had trod,
We felt the benediction of a peace
That spelled for us the hallowed name of GOD.

1939

Since I wrote this little poem before graduating from college in 1939, I am sure that the experience of an April love is not uncommon for collegians.

April Love

Along a lane in April rain
They would promenade.
They laughed and said they liked to tread
Soft and springy sod.

So far they walked, so lightly talked—
Lilacs and green grass—
They were aglow and did not know
April love would pass.

1939

We know that science is a-moral: it can be used to benefit the world and its people or to destroy them. This anti-war verse, written in 1939, personifies Science as a giant who has been ordered to be cruel and destructive. You might want to contrast this with my 2003 verse titled "Power," which blames persons who use science for ignoble purposes. The two versions use similar meters and rhymes.

Science

The brawny giant Science holds all people in his grasp.
He clutches them too tightly and guffaws to hear them gasp.
Not long ago his skillful strength accomplished good commands,
But now new masters order him to meet their dire demands
Regardless of the suffering and deaths of fellow men.
He sneers to see the battleground, and slyly guards his ken.
His bombs and guns and gases cause a cruel fratricide.
In lands that could be peaceful, only fear and hate abide.
The badly treated giant hears inhuman orders flood
To wage the war's destruction to the last red drop of blood.

1939

I wrote this anti-war verse in 1939 when World War II was devastating nation after nation.

Any War

Bands play long,
Men march strong
To madness of murder condoned by no laws.

Bomb bays yawn,
Tanks roll on
To mangle fair cities in barbarous jaws.

Flags wave high,
Brave men die
To leave children starving with no one to blame.

Triumph is sung,
Peace bells are rung,
But there is no triumph or peace–only shame.

We are told that men and women in the armed forces must be so well disciplined that they concentrate on achieving military objectives, whatever the cost in lives. Nevertheless, we have heard some of them express compassion for fallen enemies as well as for fallen comrades. I wrote "Tears" in 1939.

Tears

He bore the pain of icy wind
assaulting aching bones,
He bore the deafening burst of shells
and bullets' deadly moans,
He bore the battle legacy
of fear and wounds and blood,
But wept because a helpless foe
lay blinded in the mud.

My college classmates and I wrote and delivered orations on the subject of Peace. No words or actions of ours, however, could stay the onrush of war. Verses like this one were sadly prophetic.

Priceless

A mind made for study, for art, for wit's fire,
A body so well-knit it seldom would tire,
Lithe hands, brown and graceful, for violin strings,
Rich voice stirring deeply whenever he sings,
Pure heart beating warmly for those loved at home–
War seizes all these and awards him a tomb.

1939

I wrote this verse in 1939 after reading <u>For Whom the Bells Tolls</u>. Although I had read other accounts of brutality in war, I was shocked to read Ernest Hemingway's graphic description of the torture and rape inflicted on Loyalist women by Franco's Fascist soldiers. Like other readers, I reflected on John Donne's belief that when one person suffers, the bell tolls for all humanity.

Defeat

If Love near field of battle
Should hear a heavy tread
And see her valiant children
And husband, Freedom, dead,

In cold blue light that morning
Her silver blade would dart,
And crimson blood would darken
White robes above her heart.

The evil victors lusting
For fragrant lips and hair
Would find in angry wonder
Her chastened body there.

1939

This verse, written in 1939, mentions reasons we extol but sometimes hide from the sun.

To the Sun

Early we loved you, golden one.
You cleft the husk of night,
Scattering tassels pink and mauve
And sowing hills with light.

Truly we loved you, golden one,
Hail-fellow bold and boon;
Nevertheless we passed indoors
Your spendthrift afternoon.

Call us to gather sunset coin
When burning day is done.
Halo the children's fine-spun curls.
We love you, golden one.

1939

This quatrain from 1939 tells about something we welcome.

Relief

Hot and heavy silence
Is swept away by rain
In cool and cleansing torrents
Like sleeping after pain.

No matter how beneficial an occasional forest fire is said to be, I can't help lamenting it.

After the Fire

The lurid day has burned away.
A pallid moon discloses
ashes of the earth–
charred gray grass, carbon rocks,
trees like gaunt, black chimneys
smoking at the tops.

1940

Written in New York City on a homesick day in 1940, this poem was later set to music for voice and piano by my sister, Emma Lou Diemer. The song was published by the Southern Music Company in 1995.

October Wind in New York

There is an autumn somewhere:
I know it by the breeze
That wanders through the city
In search of smoky trees.

I see no frosted grasses,
No northward-pointing vane,
No gorgeous oaks or maples,
No silvered shocks of grain.

I see through my small window
A little grimy court,
Against the bliss of autumn
Cemented like a fort.

But somber cities never
Shall blind my shining eyes
To visions of Missouri—
Her flaming hills and skies.

I do not doubt the glory
Of sights I cannot see,
For autumn wind is blowing
A frosty kiss to me.

1940

I like to look at the changing colors of a moonstone ring given to me by my dear mother, Myrtle Diemer. This verse (1940) compares it to something else.

A Tear

A tear is a moonstone,
pale and cool.
It lies on my hand, a
somber pool,
And only a glint of
mystic fire
Recaptures the hue of
lost desire.

1940

I wrote this sonnet in 1940. Though humdrum in versification, it expresses sincere wishes.

Sonnet VIII
Three New Year Wishes

Dear friend, may Fortune richly dower you
With all the richest blessings she can give–
The intellect to plan and strength to do,
The privilege to serve and peace to live.
May Beauty ever find you sensitive
To arts of color, movement, thought, and song,
For man- and God-made wonders will outlive
The plague of war, the pestilence of wrong.
May Love, abiding in your heart, prolong
Throughout your life her steady flame that blends
The radiance of faith, the power strong
In charity, the warmth of home and friends.
Rejoice in gifts of Fortune, cherish Beauty,
But live for Love–your first and finest duty.

1940

Jean Thwing Small, a dear friend in my growing-up years, journeyed from Kansas City, Missouri, to Melbourne, Australia, in 1940 to marry a fine young Australian named John Connell. I wrote the following as a poem of farewell. Happily, Jean and I had two reunions–once when she visited the States and once when Wick and I visited Melbourne on an Elderhostel study-tour.

To Jean

The yellow glow of sunset
Gilds America, your land,
But light of dawn is shining
On another burnished strand.

That youthful country dazzles
With its waves of golden wheat,
Its gold-embedded boulders,
And its "sheep with golden feet."

We'll miss you, yet not worry,
Knowing all your days will hold
The warm and brilliant friendship
Of Australian hearts of gold.

So sail to far Australia
While our sunset fades to gloam,
And turn your face toward morning
In your new and golden home.

1940

I wrote this sonnet in 1940 when I, like all Americans, knew that our entry into World War II was inevitable.

Sonnet IX

As orderly as Mozart, Haydn, Bach,
Our former lives in fluent rhythms ran,
And all the tempos fitted in a plan
Of artful, smooth transitions—seldom shock.
Delightful counter tunes would interlock
And run along together for a span.
A pleasing harmony, as in Chopin,
Would complement a melody, not mock.
Tchaikovsky, Wagner, Beethoven, and Brahms,
If they could hear the thunder now of life,
Would be unable to suggest the roar:
There is no music in the shriek of bombs,
The crash of walls, the zoom of planes in strife,
The groans of dying men—the hell of war!

1940

After the United States Marine Band played a stirring concert in Hendricks Hall, Central Missouri State Teachers College, Warrensburg, in late 1940, the members came to dinner at our house (the college president's residence) in Selmo Park. I wrote this poem as a tribute to the Marines and as a prayer for peace.

United States Marines
(*Marine Band Banquet, 1940)*

Americans sing, exultantly sing
A song with the glorious band–
A song for the men of the mighty Marines,
Defenders of our native land.

Their power is kin to the force of the waves.
Their spirits, like clean winds, are free.
Their loyalty shines with the brilliance of stars.
Their faith is as deep as the sea.

O King of humanity, grant us Thy help
To cause the last battle to cease.
The band will begin a new anthem of praise
And Earth sing the splendor of peace.

1940

In the late 1930's and early 1940's, we read the war news with mounting horror. Hitler's armies were advancing through Europe, establishing "protectorates" in conquered nations. In this bitter poem, we hear Poles, Austrians, Norwegians, Greeks, Vichy French, and disenchanted Germans speaking to the Nazis.

Protectorate

The devil it was who caught you
at his Beer Hall table.
The devil it was who taught you
his *Mein Kampft* fable.

Blown to the jutting of doom,
we stand unstable.
Minds like an empty room,
we blat the fable.

See us goose-step! See us smile?
Heil to the label!
Heil Hitler! Heil! Heil! Heil!
(Cain, we are Abel.)

In the late 1930's and early 1940's, Hitler's Nazis were marching through Europe and shattering all hopes for a peaceful world. Mussolini and his Fascists entered the war on the side of the Nazis on June 10, 1940. I heard the news on the radio and wrote this brief poem that very day.

Echo of Strife

June 10, 1940, when Italy entered the war

The rain is cold, the wind is sad,
the sky is overhung,
and in a month that should be glad
the dirge of peace is sung.

Through all the dismal morn and noon
and night that follows after,
I wonder "Was there once a June
of light and love and laughter?"

Perhaps the rain and wind will cease,
the sky have stars and moon;
but in a world that has no peace
how can there be a June?

1940

The sensitive, kindly man in this narrative poem (1940) is much like my father, George Diemer.

Keeping Christmas

The man's lined face turned ivory as he read
The morning news–more bombs, more towns ablaze,
More people homeless, starving, spent with grief.
He dropped the paper on the floor and said,
"Our Christmas is a mockery these days.
We cannot celebrate an unbelief."

Joanna burst into the house and brought
A swirl of snow. "Granddad," she laughed "the slide
Is wonderful! At first we have a climb,
But then we swoop and skim like birds. You ought
To come and try it once. You want to ride
My sled? I'm glad it snowed for Christmas time!"

He frowned and sighed. "Somehow I don't feel quite
The usual thrill this year."

She knelt before
The blazing fire and warmed her hands. "Don't make
Me feel ashamed of you, Granddad. Tonight,
My Mama says, when Dad comes from the store,
We four can decorate the Christmas tree."

He tried to smile. Joanna chattered on.
"The midnight watch–I get to stay all through–
My first, you know. I want to hear the choir,
And Mama says the pageant is upon
The foreign Christians. They keep Christmas, too....
Well, now I'm warm enough to leave the fire."

He echoed softly, "They keep Christmas, too."
He stared into the rising flames and said,
"We must not fail to keep these holy nights."

"Did you say something?" she called back. "Will you
Come slide?"

"No, thanks, Joanna, but instead,
When you return, we'll test the Christmas lights."

Evidently I had noted the hauteur of the nobility in several books I was reading when I wrote this uncharitable verse in 1940.

To Haughty Lords and Ladies

Disdainful lords, your arms
are rust.
Your power little charms
your dust.
Conceited ladies, tombs
lack room
For your bedraggled plumes
to bloom.
Although you once were fine,
I vow
Your pride is asinine
by now.

This quatrain comments on a familiar problem of society in our time.

Media Mud

Who wants to wallow in such slime
feeding on it all the time?
Leave to marketers of gloom
their mycetozoan doom.

1940

In 1940–41 while studying for an M.A.T. degree at Teachers' College, Columbia University, I was fascinated by the diverse cultures to be found on campus and elsewhere in New York City. Although I appreciated nearly everyone I met, I privately satirized a few literary lions.

Inspirations

What disarming, charming cliques
Stir young writers to critiques?

Moppish men with flaming eyes
Shouting bawdily to the skies,

Crones in chronic love despair
Plaiting ashes in their hair,

Lacquered wits who smoothly drop
Thoughts that flip before they flop—

What disarming, charming cliques
Beckoning the younger freaks!

1941

I remember writing this verse (1941) while attending graduate school in New York City, where sirens frequently disturbed the peace of night.

Siren

A siren is sounding
softly now.
An accident happened–
What and how?
It rises and rises
piercing air.
A dismal disaster–
When and where?
It screams to a climax
shrill and high.
A tragedy called it–
Why, O why?

1941

All of us have given and taken ridicule. This 1941 verse comments on the cost.

Ridicule

I would choose to write
My greatest hopes in sand
And see them swept aside
By tides upon the strand;

I would choose to speak
My strongest words in rain
And laugh to hear each one
Come tumbling down again;

I would choose to beat
A sea cliff with my hand
And shudder that my blows
Dislodged no grain of sand–

Yes, rather would I choose
To do these things in vain
Than have your scornful laugh
Re-cross my heart with pain.

1941

"Girl in the Rain" (1941) is about someone suffering heartache for a reason undisclosed to the reader. Is the relentless beat like rain on a roof?

Girl in the Rain

She trudged beneath the foggy lights illuminating Main
And hoped for consolation in the coming of the rain.
The storm refused to be a friend with sympathetic tears
But shot down from the darkness a barrage of flashing spears.
She felt the icy sharpness of the shocks against her skin
Attacking with the fury of crusaders battling sin.

She plodded home in misery to end her futile tramp
And changed her clothes to free herself from clinging, stinging damp.
Retreating to her attic cot, she heard a tin tattoo
And fancied that the hostile spears would pierce and shatter through.
Was there no way to hide herself from this hard-hearted rain?
It seemed the loud percussion in a symphony of pain.

1941

The entry of our nation into World War II was imminent when I wrote this poem, in which the speaker is a woman deprived of her lover by World War I. It is one of several of my poems chosen by my graduate school, Columbia University, New York City, for publication in *Columbia Poetry, 1941*.

Hyacinths

Close the silken draperies, my dear;
You know I like a softness as of dusk.
(Breezes bring grape hyacinths too near—
There are so many memories in musk.)

Draw them gently, gently. Thank you, niece.
Yes, run along... She takes a light with her.
Here I sit in dimness and in peace
To hear the clock tick and the old cat purr...

Hyacinths—how blue they were that day!
I wore my new white frock, a frilly thing.
Boyishly he plucked a blue bouquet.
"To match your eyes!" My heart learned how to sing.

When he spoke, he tossed his golden hair
And smiled at me. His hazel eyes were warm.
Hyacinths mean this to me: my fair
Young lover in an olive uniform.

Yes, I like the curtains drawn—surcease
Of sun and musky fragrance. I prefer
Sitting here in dimness and in peace
To hear the clock tick and the old cat purr...

1941

This poem was published in Columbia Poetry, 1941, Columbia University Press, New York. The selections were made by Allan Abbott, Oscar James Campbell, Donald Lemen Clark, Clare Howard, Leonora Speyer, and Mark Van Doren.

Wind

If I could see you, Wind,
You would whirl white and magnificent from the sea,
Roll red across the beaches,
Run like yellow-orange fire through the tops of trees,
Under their thick branches linger cool and green,
Flutter blue across the inland lakes,
Swirl indigo around the snow-caps,
And undulate violet in the sky.
You would be too beautiful, Wind, to see.

1941

In June, 1941, in the Christian Church, Warrensburg, Missouri, my brothers, my sister, and I presented a recital of music in honor of our parents on their Silver Wedding Anniversary. We included some original music and poetry.

Silver Tribute

You have loved these silver things:
Wedding spoons and baby rings,
Sunlight sheen of forest pools,
Moonlight silhouette of home,
Burning lamps in halls of schools,
Flash of rain on a golden dome.

Your lives have been, will always be,
Like the things you cherish, silvery—
Useful, lovely, pure and bright.
So your sons and daughters found
Songs for tribute that they might
Try to bring you...silver sound.

Although the United States tried to stay out of World War II, we supported the Allies with lend-lease and other programs. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, our Congress had to declare war. I wrote the following in 1941.

Contrast

I

Laugh, sun, laugh,
For in my heart of hearts
I know the dancing morning
Plays hope in many parts.

Rise, sun, rise,
And bid the world good cheer,
While hearts like mine are saying,
"Perhaps the peace is here!"

II

Moan, wind, moan,
For in my soul of souls
I know the lonely night tide
Plays grief in many roles.

Wind, you came a-crying
Tidings we abhor,
And souls like mine are breaking
Beneath the weight of war.

1944

George W. Diemer, Jr., my brother, served in the United States Marine Air Corps Reserves in World War II. As the pilot of a Corsair fighter plane, he served valiantly in the Marshall Islands until March 26, 19 44, when he was killed in a plane crash. Our parents asked me to write a poem about George. They printed it in a memorial folder with appropriate passages from the Bible and a smiling picture of George in Marine dress uniform. The poem was reprinted in our high school newspaper, The Southwest Trail,, and in other publications.

TAPS

We must not ask the bitter question "Why?"
Nor mourn the songs that never will be sung;
To doubt, to grieve too much were to decry
The brimming fervor of the deathless young.

This one we loved had music in his soul:
We heard his anthems fill the sunlit nave,
His sweet-voiced cornet ring and beauty roll
From moon-washed crags in wave on silver wave.

O there was music in the way he laughed
And in the lights and depths of his blue eyes!
O there was music when he flew his craft
Alone and shining in the summer skies!

He thought his laughter hid his parting tear;
He mostly wrote of things from war apart;
In foxholes of Tarawa conquered fear.
How many ways we knew his mighty heart!

At school and camp each star-eyed girl and boy,
At home his love, his friends, his relatives,
His choir of bold Marines on barren Roi—
All know his music and it ever lives.

Let songs be sung for him when sunsets glow
And first stars shine, where water gently laps
On verdant shores; another bugler blow
His benediction— clear, sweet, lingering *Taps.*

1945

In 1945 the Golden Rule Foundation chose our mother, Myrtle Casebolt Diemer (Mrs. George W. Diemer), as Missouri State Mother. My sister, Emma Lou Diemer, composed a melody and piano accompaniment for this brief text. We played and sang "A Song for Mother" for family and guests on Mother's Day. I remember that although our mother was pleased with the song and with everyone's good wishes, she insisted that other mothers were more deserving of the Golden Rule honor. Well, we know there are millions of good mothers, but naturally we gladly paid loving tribute to our own.

A Song for Mother

I never wonder at your eyes
alight with love like beauteous skies.

I never wonder at your hand
as sweet as rain on weary land.

I never wonder when you speak
like music of the world we seek.

Nor do I wonder when you smile
with joy of work and life worthwhile.

I never wonder, Mother: long ago I knew,
O Mother, only God could make the soul of you!

1948

This brief poem is addressed to Wickliffe Byron Hendry. Wick was a captain in the United States Army when we were married on Christmas Day, 1944, in the First Christian Church, Warrensburg, Missouri. I wrote this poem in 1948. Now in 2003, I am still in love with Wick. Col. ret. Wickliffe B. Hendry is a splendid husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, engineer, farmer, church member, patriot, and dear companion.

To My Love

When we were first romancing
My words to you came dancing
As a fountain from a mountain
Springing bright and cool.

But now our love is older
My thoughts beneath a boulder
Are spilling and distilling
In a deep, sweet pool.

1948

This verse dates back to 1948 when we suffered the loss of our beloved son Byron.

Burning

The light is taken.
The night is dim.
We awaken
And think of him.

We dread tomorrow–
A day of fears,
A day of sorrow,
A day of tears.

Is it forever
Though hours ago?
We must endeavor
To cool the woe.

We feel the burning,
A crimson coal–
Eternal yearning
Within the soul.

1948

Whenever I think how blessed we are with our son Alan and our three daughters, Betty, Terri, and Bonny, I think, too, of Byron, our first son. He died at the age of eight and one-half months after an emergency operation by a well-meaning but inadequate surgeon. His father and I cherish special memories of this happy, beautiful child and miss him every day.

My Blue-eyed Lad

I.
Have you looked into eyes as blue
As morning glories bright with dew,
Eyes as blue as a bluebird's wing
Or hyacinths in early spring?

Blue eyes, blue eyes–they may be
Filled with blue of a prairie lea
Or filled like mountain lakes with skies–
Laughing, loving, clear and wise.

Refrain
Everywhere I go, I see the blue-eyed people,
Everywhere I go, I smile at blue-eyed people,
Yet my smile is tender and my smile is sad,
For I never see my blue-eyed lad
Among the blue-eyed people.

II.
Have you looked into eyes so blue
That Heaven entered the heart of you,
Eyes with blue of a driftwood fire,
Eyes with beauty beyond desire?

Blue eyes, blue eyes–they may be
Somber and sad as a darkening sea,
Or they may sparkle and gleam with light
Like brightest stars of a desert night.

Refrain
Everywhere I go, I see the blue-eyed people,
Everywhere I go, I smile at blue-eyed people,
Yet my smile is tender and my smile is sad,
For I never see my blue-eyed lad
Among the blue-eyed people.

1948

This is a song for Byron, the precious baby son who lighted our lives from July 13, 1947, to March 28, 1948. There must be a God who loves him even more.

Lullaby

Lullaby, lullaby, Baby, my darling.
Trees are in bloom on the hill.
Breezes are murmuring in the green grasses.
Lambs are asleep by the rill.

A meadowlark sang in the afterglow.
He nestles in sleep through the night.
He will sing again when the morning breaks
And wing in heavenly flight.

Lullaby, lullaby, Baby, my darling.
Trees are in bloom on the hill.
Lullaby, lullaby, my little fledgling.
Starlight is lovely and still.

1950

This is a salute to Wick and his sisters, who attended a good old-fashioned country school near the family farm in Holt, Kentucky.

Country School

In springtime after a game or class
you raced each other to the pump
athirst for water as for being.
You made the handle creak and thump
till water gushed and drenched the grass
and you drank deeply–tasting, seeing.

1950

Like other mothers, I wanted our children to have lives blessed with the best of all gifts. In this poem, written in the late 1940's and early 1950's, the reference to "Corinthian page" means, of course, First Corinthians, Chapter 13. I am grateful that our daughters–Betty, Terri, and Bonny–and our son Alan, too, have received and given love all their lives. My sister, Emma Lou Diemer, set "The Gift" to music for women's chorus and organ.

The Gift

Dear baby daughter, there is something fine
I long to give you. I have seen it shine
On faces of bright youth and brighter age
From lucid beauty of Corinthian page.

Whenever I hold you, I hear it trill
Like thrush song on a blossom-drifted hill
And feel it rise and overflow and bless
A mother's heart with calm and happiness.

O my precious daughter, it is strong
And lives beyond our grief and conquers wrong.
What I would give, I cannot give, yet know
That you will find it anywhere you go.

1950

When I was young, my parents always requested one of my poems for a Christmas card to send to thousands of their friends. Recipients knew related facts about this one. Since Dad, George W. Diemer, was the president of Central Missouri State, Warrensburg, the family lived in the College Residence, a handsome old house built in 1871. In 1950, it had to be completely renovated, but it was looking better than ever by Christmastime and was pictured on the card. My mother's mother, Lizzie Casebolt, knitted pretty pink or blue booties for her new great-grandchildren and the new babies of faculty members and other friends.

"Day Unto Day...."
Psalm XIX

God gives a continuity
of star and word and being
which only children
or the very wise
have eyes for seeing;

but sometimes on a wintering hill
we see the sunlight leaping
to touch the charm
of an old, old house
renewed and in good keeping;

or sometimes in a book-lined room
we hear our people talking
of whence we came
and whither we go
and what is the road for walking;

and rarely in the hearth-fire glow
we see a woman sitting
lovingly for
a great-grandchild
a pair of booties knitting.

1950

At the request of my parents, George and Myrtle Diemer, I wrote this sonnet for a Christmas card. A WDAF radio announcer read it on a program of poetry for the Kansas City area. My sister, Emma Lou Diemer, used it as a text for a choral composition which was performed in churches during the 1950's.

For Unto You

Ye gentle mothers, bring your babes tonight,
Ye joyful little children, gather near,
Ye men of fire and courage, men of might,
Come, all ye people come! The tidings hear!
And bring with you the weary and the ill,
The hungry ones, the lonely and distraught,
And call to those oppressed that trusting still
They shall be free to come as in their thought.
Ye people, listen! Now by starlight chimes
A joyous carillon; the organ sings
Great tidings to all ages, to all climes;
In exultation *Hallelujah!* rings.
O sing with many voices pure and strong
This night, this wondrous Christmas night, one song!

1954

After World War II my father, Dr. George W. Diemer, was sent by the United States State Department on educational missions abroad. In 1946 he was a member of a delegation of distinguished American educators who studied the needs of Japanese students and teachers and recommended ways for the schools to become more democratic and effective. He was one of a select committee returning to Japan after five years to see how well the changes were progressing. He served with other delegations helping schools in Germany, England, and Libya. When he was returning from Libya to our home in Warrensburg, Missouri, I wrote the following sonnet. It was printed on my parents' Christmas card, along with campus scenes and seasonal greetings.

Tripoli Homeward
November, 1954

Below your clipper rolls the azure tide
Oblivious and bright. Cloud towers break
Across your wings and, hurtling back sun-pied
And tattered, merge resplendent in your wake.
You think of Roman ruins deep in sand,
And palmed oases where the Libyans tend
Their oxen drawing water for green land
And dark-eyed children calling "Farewell, O Friend!"
Your mission finished, now you pierce the blue
Of ether high above the trackless foam.
Your eager heart is flying straight and true:
Your course is love; your destination, home!

1954

This poem was written in 1954 for the laying of the cornerstone of Asbury Methodist Church, Prairie Village, Kansas. It was read also at anniversary homecomings.

Hymn for a New Church

Build up a living church
With more than steel and stone.
Build up with faith and love
This church to be God's own.

Christ be the architect
And Heaven on Earth his plan.
Fling wide the gospel door
To woman, child, and man.

Great Christian brotherhood,
Record God's will in thine.
Work hand in hand with love
To build the Church Divine;

1955

Our eldest daughter, Betty, was ten years old in November, 1955, when I wrote this verse. As it suggests, she learned the importance of good books and good friends. Our younger children did too!

Friendly Books and People

When my years have passed two score,
There will enter through this door
My daughter, fair and shy.
O remembering year by year
All most beautiful and dear,
What words for her have I?

Should I read a favorite book,
Tell how young and serious look
Friends by candlelight?
I shall say their song and laughter,
Ringing in the heart long after,
Lift the dark of night.

1957

In 1956 my husband Wick and our four children moved to a house we had built in Raytown, a suburb of Kansas City, Missouri. Miss Louise Twiehaus, principal of Southwood Elementary School, persuaded me to teach a fifth grade class of 42 students. I hesitated because my previous experience had been teaching English in high schools and in the University of Minnesota. I accepted the challenge, however. I enjoyed working with the fifth graders and appreciated Louise Twiehaus. In the spring of 1957, she told us she was leaving teaching to marry a widower with three children. The faculty and the PTA gave her a farewell luncheon. This is a poem I wrote for the occasion.

A Sonnet of Farewell

A golden harmony you gave our day.
We waited, as it were, by shadowy trees
On darkling hills for dawn to come, Louise;
And you stepped forth and smiled the gloom away.
Or like musicians, warming up to A,
Who try their reeds and bows with careless ease
And wail chromatics in the wildest keys,
We paused...until you, Maestro, bade us play.
We therefore found and never shall forget
Your dawning smile, your joy of laboring
To blend our various notes in one high song.
Farewell! A deeper voice, and dearer yet,
Has called, and winsome children beg you bring
Harmonious gladness home where you belong.

1957

This sonnet, written in April, 1957, does not describe the times we teachers feel tired and discouraged. Instead, it describes a morning when we feel enthusiastic about the prospect of teaching. By the way, this teacher obviously has an open window rather than air conditioning.

Good Morning, Teacher

Awakened from the purple fold of night
By lilting matin of a meadowlark,
You feel, before you see, the warm delight
Of golden morning sweeping back the dark,
And blissfully you linger moments more.
You stretch and breathe the air of May-time, blown
For your enchantment from imperial store
Of lilac blossoms and green grass, new mown.
On such a day or any day hereafter,
How could you have the prospect of more joys–
You with your insight and your gift of laughter–
Than teaching eager, lively girls and boys?
To rise with smiles as lovely as your own,
A queen would give her scepter, crown, and throne!

1957

We like to see the influence of good teachers on children. This is a tribute to such a teacher in Southwood Elementary School, Raytown, Missouri, in 1957.

To a Teacher

You welcomed him to school and smiled
And captivated him–my child.
He sauntered home a little bolder,
Self-disciplined, and somehow older.
Ideas you shared with him in school,
Like pebbles dropped into a pool,
Educed his curious thoughts on things
In wider and ever wider rings.
In knowledge, strength, and skill he grew
The months he spent in class with you.

Whatever way he was my own,
He will be still when he is grown;
But in the way his mind matures
And in his heart, he's also yours.

1957

In 1957 I wrote a one-act musical comedy named Hawthorn Spring, suitable for production by actors and singers in middle school or high school. Its time setting is any spring, and its place setting is rural Missouri, which is blessed with an abundance of natural springs. Characters with diverse personalities and motives make fateful wishes when a magic spring, dry for 70 years, begins flowing again. Here is the title song, sung by characters and chorus at the beginning and end of the play. By the way, Missouri's state flower is the hawthorn, and its state bird is the bluebird.

Hawthorn Spring

Hawthorn Spring–
You may come here
Down a country lane
When bluebirds sing
And the sky is clear
After an April rain.

Hawthorn Spring–
Here you will know
If the waters rise
To wish one thing
And drink and go,
Glad and a little wise.

1957

In my one-act musical comedy Hawthorn Spring (1957), each of the assorted characters makes a wish when the magic spring begins flowing again. When the spring stops flowing, the characters find that their wishes have been answered in appropriate, but not necessarily pleasing, ways. In the following song early in the play, Jane, a lovely young woman, expresses sadness because Paul, the young man she loves, is so despondent over his father's death that he has turned away from her.

Cry for Me, April

Cry for me, April,
You with your tender face.
Cry for me, April,
You with your womanly grace.

High clouds flying,
You have not set me free.
Soft winds sighing,
You know the longing in me.

Where has love gone, April,
Fair as your dogwood crown?
Shall we mourn it, April,
Showering white tears down?

Cry for me, April,
You with your tender face.
Cry for me, April,
You with your womanly grace.

Paul is the romantic lead in my musical comedy Hawthorn Spring (1957). As the play opens, Paul is mourning his father and mentor and has lost his sense of direction. He sings this song to Jane, the girl he hopes will help him.

Driftwood

Like driftwood riding the river tide,
I'm drifting far and drifting wide.
Driftwood may go down to the sea,
And nobody knows where I shall be.

Once I had a wheel to steer,
A course to chart, and ports to clear.
Now I'm drifting carelessly
Away on a careless odyssey.

If you, my love, would call to me,
I'd leave the river, leave the sea
With no regret and one desire–
To stay with you by a driftwood fire.

1957

In my musical comedy Hawthorn Spring, Mr. Midas gives his formula for success to Danny, his office boy. The chorus repeats his admonitions and adds a comment.

Think Big, Act Big, and Don't Forget Your Pills

I.

Mr. Midas: No doubt you want to emulate
The formula I advocate:
Think big, act big,
And don't forget your pills!

Chorus: Think big, act big,
And don't forget your pills!

II.

Mr. Midas: Young man, you must accelerate,
Accumulate and liberate.
Think big, act big,
And don't forget your pills!

Chorus: Think big, act big,
And don't forget your pills!

III.

Mr. M idas: Discriminate and circulate,
Ingratiate and cultivate.
Think big, act big,
And don't forget your pills!

Chorus: Think big, act big,
And don't forget your pills!

IV.

Mr. Midas: Anticipate and arbitrate,
Annihilate and dominate.
Think big, act big,
And don't forget your pills!

Chorus: Think big, act big,
And don't forget your pills!

V.

Mr. Midas: Ow–ow–Ouch! I think my pills are late!

Chorus: Could it be something that you ate?
Poor man, we all commiserate.
Think big, talk big,
And don't forget your pills!

In my musical Hawthorn Spring (1957), Danny is a smart sixteen-year-old office boy who supposes he will become a tycoon. After he sees what happens to his boss, Mr. Midas, when Mr. Midas's wish is granted, Danny changes his mind about what matters in life. He pleases his friend Peggy by saying that her freckles (which she has loathed) are "cute." The following "Essay on Girls" shows one of his new ambitions.

Essay on Girls

I. When I was only a boy of eleven, I knew more than men up to, say, ninety-seven
On the subject of girls. Though nobody listened to me, I stated positively,
"Girls are witches with curls, overrated by males infatuated and superannuated.
Look at the way girls beg to play in my ball-game. It's a shame!
If they strike out, they cry. If I let them get a run, they brag to everyone
That they are better than I.
O take those tag-along, tattle-tale bawl-babies;
But as for me, give me liberty, or give me rabies!"

II. Could I have been mistaken all along?
(A wise man confesses when he's wrong.)
In my earlier confusion
I jumped to a delusion
On the fascinating subject of girls.
Girls, girls, girls–my mind whirls.
Lately I've detected
From data I've collected
That girls may be terrific;
And being scientific,
I mean to study more about girls.

III. I carry in my mind
A picture of the kind
Of girl I want to know–
Smiling and pretty,
With words warm and witty
To melt my worries like snow.
If I could walk with her,
If I could talk with her,
My world would bloom like spring.
She would be queen
Of the whole happy scene
And I would be the proud king.

1957

In my one-act musical comedy Hawthorn Spring (1957), Miss Shilly-Shally is a Missouri woman who can't make up her mind. Her song mentions places, events, and mascots well known in Missouri–such as the M. U. Tigers and the Central University Mules.

Should I?

Miss Shilly-Shally: Should I hunt for a hunter
In the Ozark hills,
Or fish for a fisherman
In Gravois Mills?

Chorus: Miss Shilly-Shally,
Hurry if you can.
Miss Shilly-Shally,
Choose a man!

Miss Shilly-Shally: Should I wrangle a wrangler
At the Royal show,
Or pack away a packer
From old St. Joe?

Chorus: Miss Shilly-Shally,
Hurry if you can.
Miss Shilly-Shally,
Choose a man!

Miss Shilly-Shally: Should I pitch for a pitcher
Who's a Tiger or a Mule,
Or catch me a catcher
From William Jewell?

Chorus: Miss Shilly-Shally,
Hurry if you can.
Miss Shilly-Shally,
Choose a man!

Miss Shilly-Shally: Of course he will be
A Mis-sou-ri-an,
But how can I settle
For just one man?

Chorus: Miss Shilly-Shally,
Hurry if you can.
Miss Shilly-Shally,
Choose a man!

Miss Dilly-Dally, who dabbles in sundry arts, is a character in my musical comedy Hawthorn Spring (1957).

The Dilettante

Chorus: Miss Dilly-Dally, do your part.
Miss Dilly-Dally, choose one art.

Miss Dilly-Dally: If I must choose a thing
To do with all my heart,
I think I'll sing *The Ring*.
Let's see...how does it start?

I might design a head
For *Winged Victory*,
Or should I finish dead
Old Schubert's *Symphony?*

Chorus: Miss Dilly-Dally, though aiming for the top,
You are falling down with a flop, flop, flop.

Miss Dilly-Dally: Mona Lisa's smile
Is e-nig-mat-ic.
Why shouldn't I make
It democratic?

The Washington monument
Is much too plain,
Why shouldn't I stripe it
Like a peppermint cane?

Chorus: Miss Dilly-Dally, though aiming for the top,
You are falling down with a flop, flop, flop.

Miss Dilly-Dally: I held an exhibition
In the art school mall,
And they sent me to audition
In the Music Hall.

But over in the Hall
When I tootled on my flute,
They said, "Why don't you call
At the Art Institute?"

Chorus: Miss Dilly-Dally, though aiming for the top,
You are falling down with a flop, flop, flop.

1957

Miss Dilly-Dally: I cast a bust in bronze
And it was much discussed.
The critics looked and said,
"Now there is a bust."

Whenever people see
My paintings vis-a-vis,
They say I ought to hang
In a public gallery.

Chorus: Miss Dilly-Dally, though aiming for the top,
You are falling down with a flop, flop, flop.

For Miss Dilly-Dally, Miss Shilly-Shally, and Chorus:

Miss Dilly-Dally: I haven't the heart to choose one art.

Miss Shilly -Shally: I haven't the art to choose one heart.

Chorus: *Miss Dilly-Dally, you have nothing to lose.*
Miss Shilly-Shally, you really ought to choose.

1957

This is a happy song from the finale of my musical Hawthorn Spring (1957). Paul and Jane are finding love in the "Show-Me State" of Missouri.

Show Me

Jane: I'm from Missouri. Show me!
Pretend I'm the jury. Show me!

Can you provide circumstantial evidence?
You don't need to make a speech and keep me in suspense.

I'm prejudiced for you
So all you need to do
Is show me, darling, show me!

Paul: What can I say but show me?
Do you know the way to show me?

My tongue is so recalcitrant it cannot heed my heart
But prattles Latin lexicons with no romantic art.

I'm looking for a lead
So won't you intercede
And show me, darling, show me!

Jane: Who needs any words to show me?
Just listen to the birds and show me!

Warblers are warbling to purple violets
Tanagers are trilling pretty triolets...

Paul: Hummingbirds hum in a hawthorn tree.
Woodpeckers strum in a jolly jubilee...

Paul and Jane: Who needs any words?
Just listen to the birds
And show me, darling, show me!

1959

In July, 1943, I lost a dear friend from college days, Joe Winemiller, when his B-26 crashed in flames. This poem, a memorial tribute to Joe, won an award in the Religious Arts Festival of the Central Presbyterian Church, Rochester, New York, in 1959. As you probably know, pilots say "C.A.V.U." when ceiling and visibility are unlimited.

C.A.V.U.

Drench the clouds with throbs of dissonant music.
Pin your planes like crosses on the night.
Not on earth but where the moon is whitest,
Think of him who loved unbroken light.

We on earth have seen the meteor streaking.
We have heard the roaring of the fire.
We have thought him sacrifice to freedom,
Bleakly mourned, and searched the cindered pyre.

You who fly and felt him brush in passing
Know from mist to boundless light he veers,
Toward the Hall of Highest Flyers soaring
Winged and free beyond the shining spheres.

1960

I wrote this free verse poem in 1960 before learning that fallen leaves should be composted, not burned. I still regret having to give up the incense.

Burning Leaves

Remember, as we rake the russet leaves,
how they in March clung close and hard,
in April loosed a golden haze, still tentative,
and in May sprang forth in fountains of green joy.

Remember, as we heap the russet leaves
how their blue fastness on far hills
and their cool shadowing of pool and lawn
slowed the pace of summer to one
long walk with family and friends.

Remember, as we burn the russet leaves,
how lately with a different fire they
blazed as brilliantly–yellow, orange, red–
and danced to earth, compounding glory.

Come warm yourself in radiance, my dear,
and breathe the incense of these burning leaves
betokening new splendors year by year.

1960

This simple verse, written in 1960, is, of course, an understated tribute to my father, George W. Diemer.

Hero

I knew a man, a kindly man,
when I was only three.
He swung me high up in the air
or told brave tales to me.

This rugged, handsome man and I
when I was nine or ten
would climb a mountain to its peak
and view the world again.

This man, this understanding man,
smoothed my teen-age way
and cheered me when I won my wings
on graduation day.

In 1960, the National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA) launched a 100-foot-diameter satellite to an altitude of 235 miles and inflated it successfully. Used for communications and weather monitoring, this satellite became known as Echo I. It was a favorite of sky watchers like our family because it was so large and easy to see. We would gather near the trellis of white clematis on my mother's lawn and follow the movement of Echo I across the night sky. This poem describes the experience.

Echo I

A new white beauty wanders tremulous
Among the steadfast stars and dims and dies.

We are unwilling now to break the spell
And so we wait; and while we wait, we watch
The same old moon adrift in clouds and sky
And white moths fluttering in the clematis.
We feel the tender air and breathe its scent,
The seeming essence of all purity.
We hear the cool white silence of the night,
More passionate and more profound than music.

Slowly then the echoing wonder comes
Down half-forgotten lanes of childhood bliss
And mystic corridors of unknown time:
The old white beauty of the Infinite.

1961

After the death of our beloved mother, Myrtle Diemer, we were surrounded by dear family friends at the visitation. We knew these friends were grieving, too, and we appreciated their kindness to our family. Somehow the true incident related here added a dimension that I, for one, needed. Religious faith helps, but the sense of loss cannot be ignored.

Friends at the Visitation

Stately men and women, streaming past the coffin,
gazed at her face illumined by the undertaker's art.
"She looks so peaceful," they said, "so natural."

They touched their tears away and circled in the parlor,
rose-lighted, blossom-scented, a semblance of her garden.
They told heartwarming stories of working with her,
learning from her, treasuring her kindness and humor.

These good people embraced me and said,
"We loved her, too. We understand your loss.
Surely your dear mother is already in Heaven
singing with God's choir of angels."

What could I do but hug them back and sympathize,
hiding a painful gap in my emotions?

Last came a tall old woman, stateliest of all.
She took one look at the waxen face and cried out,
"This is terrible! Terrible! Just terrible!"
Her husband, blushing like a boy, caught
her arm and pulled her from the room...

but not before I felt in my heart's core,
She speaks for my rebellion, too.

In 1961 the Hymn Society of America invited poets and composers to submit new hymns on the theme of marriage. Emma Lou Diemer provided music for the following text.

O God of Beauty

O God of beauty, God of truth,
Endow this maiden and this youth,
Who solemnly before Thee bow
To pledge their holy marriage vow,
With gift that can be only Thine–
A love transcendent, love divine.

How strong together, yet how free
These two in Christian love should be!
No task should daunt his manly pride
Or turn her willing grace aside.
Pray help them, God, to build with Thee
A mansion for eternity!

O may their love in winter bloom,
Or burn with hope within the gloom
Of shadowed vale and troubled night.
Pray lead them faithfully aright
Into the dawn of ecstasy
And love, all glorified in Thee!

O God of Living, God of light,
Pray bless each home within thy sight.
Help children and their elders grow
In wisdom and in stature so
That all may dwell here and above
Within the Kingdom of Thy Love.

1962

"To Him All Glory Give" is an anthem for choir and organ with text by Dorothy Diemer Hendry and music by Emma Lou Diemer. It was published in 1962 by the Elkan-Vogel Company, Philadelphia.

To Him All Glory Give

To the ice-locked river God says, "Flow."
The river surges, singing, "It is so."

To the somber skies God says, "Smile again."
Warm and golden shines the sun: "Amen."

To the dismal woodland God says, "Grow."
Boughs in beauty bloom: "For God aglow."

Gently to his birds God whispers, "Sing."
"Praise to God!" their joyful carols ring.

To our wintry spirits God calls, "Live!"
"We gladly live! To Him all glory give!"

1962

This is an anthem lyric with Biblical quotations. Emma Lou Diemer set it to music for choir and organ in the 1960's.

A Little While

"A little while, and you see me no more;
Again a little while, and you will see me."

What did He mean by this: "a little while"?
Why did He go away and leave his people?

Now comes a clouded time of pain and travail:
No sight, no sound, no touch, no breath of Him!
We cannot see Him through our mist of tears.
We cannot hear Him through our fog of doubt.
In city smoke we feel the stab of hate.
In crater dust we breathe the fumes of death.

Where have you gone without your people, Lord?
What did you mean: "again a little while"?

"In truth I tell you, though you mourn and cry
You shall arise from cloud of grief to joy.
A woman when her time has come must bear
The labor pain, but when her child is born,
She will forget the anguish in her joy
Because a man is born into this world.
So is it now with you: this little while
Your hearts are filled with sadness, but when
I come to you again, you will be joyful.
No one will ever take away your joy!"

When you come again, we shall be joyful!
No one will ever take away our joy!

1965

Living and working in the space city of Huntsville, we feel wonder and pride in every lift-off. I wrote this verse about 1965.

Saturn

Old Roman Saturn of the marbled vein
and sinew, frigid in your temple flame,
we have improved on gods since you but deign
for old times' sake to pass along your name.

Hail to our newborn Saturn, proud in power,
who shakes the air with thundering and jars
the earth and surges upward from his tower
in pillared smoke and fire to seed the stars.

1965

Have you ever tasted a berry of Celastus scandens? If so, you will sympathize with the girl in this poem, revised in 1965.

BITTERSWEET

Once in a forest, a dense, drab forest,
Where burs caught her sweater and leaves slowed her feet,
She spied a cluster, a strange bright cluster,
And plucked a berry of bronze bittersweet.

Eager and curious, she tasted the spurious
And puckered her lips at the pungent surprise,
Long to remember the fruit of November
With sweet on her tongue and sting in her eyes.

1965

Have you ever listened to a mockingbird all night long? I have, and I wrote this poem about the experience in 1965.

To a Mockingbird

Pour the spring night full of songs
All eloquent and none the same
And let me learn, sweet mockingbird,
The gladdest meaning of your name.

I hear you rhapsodize the moon
That sails a sea of drifting foam
Or anchors in old apple trees
And lights my silvery pathway home.

Fond thief, you plagiarize my dreams
Of love and all things angel-bright;
You make of them a mockery
More fraught with beauty than the night.

1965

I painted these contrasting portraits in 1965. Perhaps you know women in both categories.

Two Portraits

I.

Her supercilious mother, doting on
The baby's auburn curls and pouting lips
Foretold parades of captivated beaux.

Her haughty father thought a silver spoon
Would hardly do for her, the heiress to
His wealth and wit, and had one wrought of gold.

Her name, engraved upon the spoon, was Joy,
But joy she never gave and never knew.

II.

Little they left her, only a name,
Nothing of fortune, nothing of fame;
Yet somehow their dream and their blessing came
To baby Felicia all the same.

The dream was of love, and love she gave,
Mirthful and merry or tender and grave,
To duckling and puppy and prince and knave.
Many a being her love would save.

The blessing was courage, courage to go
Through danger and darkness, illness and woe,
God to discover and Heaven to know
Wherever the lights of felicity glow.

1965

In 1965 my composer sister, Dr. Emma Lou Diemer, asked me to write words for one of her commissioned works–a cantata celebrating the centennial of the Maryland State Teachers Association. We used the centennial theme: "Free Minds in a Free State." I have a recording of the beautiful concert by the Maryland State Chorus, the All-Maryland High School Orchestra, and the All-Maryland High School Band (600 young musicians), directed by Dr. Howard Barlow in the Civic Center Auditorium, Baltimore, on October 15, 1965.

I. Birthday of a Glory

Sing a glory, sing a glory
Born of vision long ago.
Sing a glory worth the travail,
Worth the joys that overflow.

Save a glory, long transcending
Change and challenge, war and woe.
Valiant countrymen and colleagues,
Save a glory! Help it grow!

Give allegiance to a glory!
Give our lives to celebrate
Our most sacred right to teach
Free minds in the free state.

II. A Dark Place

The mind becomes a dark place
When Bigotry slams the door,
When Ignorance nails the shutters fast,
And Fear creeps over the floor.
No true shape can the flickering eyes
Of Prejudice discern,
But watching a shadow reel and writhe,
They bitter, bitter burn.

III. Free Minds

Eager to learn, a mind unfolds–
Free as the sunbeam a baby holds,
Free as blue waves a girl embraces,
Free as wind a wild boy races.

(continued on next page)

Free minds ask about the stars,
Frogs, volcanoes, Russian czars,
Protons, *Hamlet*, or the Peace Corps,
And always ask one question more.

Climbing a ladder, minds of the young
Earn their freedom, rung by rung:
Learn, interpret, organize,
Reason, imagine, philosophize.

Schools might be a testing stand,
Well-equipped and ably manned,
Where rocket-minds prepare to soar
Higher than any minds before.

Emma Lou repeated the "Sing a Glory" theme in the final movement of the cantata. In 1968, when I wrote the poetic drama Kaleidoscope, I reused the poem "A Dark Place" as a description of the evil character named Shadow. As we teachers know, we must overcome ignorance and prejudice to teach successfully. The Maryland theme speaks for all of us: "Free Minds in a Free State."

1967

When Marcia Miller (now Marcia Keller) worked as a student teacher with me, I learned much from her. She had lived in Japan and planned a delightful unit on the writing of haiku. Here are three of mine, though I hasten to say they are not as good as hers and those of some of our students.

Huntsville Symphony

To be a flute tone
seaward borne on such a tide–
O magnificence!

Faith

Though you shake with cold,
old sycamore, you shelter
yellow crocuses.

Mockingbird

Plagiarist of
moon, pine, and dogwood, sing our
silvery way home.

1967

"Winds of Spring" is an anthem with text by Dorothy Diemer Hendry and music for choir and organ by Emma Lou Diemer. It was published in 1967 by Harold Flammer, New York.

Winds of Spring

Glory to God for winds of spring–
The rough-and-tumble gale
That rolls the rumbling thunder-heads
And strews the rain and hail.

Glory to God for winds of spring–
The housekeeper wind on high
Sweeping clouds away from the sun
And cleaning the blue, blue sky.

Glory to God for winds of spring–
The ballerina breeze
Scattering fragrance, robins' songs,
And petals of cherry trees.

Glory to God for winds of spring–
The secret whispering
Deep in the core of a coffined seed,
The wondrous quickening.

Blow us the winds of spring, O God–
Strong and clean and true!
Blow us thy rapturous love, O God,
That we may live anew!

1967

"Honor to Thee," is an anthem for choir and organ with text by Dorothy Diemer Hendry and music by Emma Lou Diemer. It was published in 1967 by the H. W. Gray Company, Inc., New York.

Honor to Thee

Honor to Thee, O Holy Spirit,
Moving over darkness and deep
To bring forth light! Alleluia!

Glory to Thee, Eternal Lord,
Molding galaxies to fill
Continuous space and time! Alleluia!

Praise to Thee, Almighty God,
Powering the atom, breathing life
Ineffable into a cell! Alleluia!

Love to Thee, our Heavenly Father,
Making for this flowering and fruitful earth
Children in Thy image. Alleluia!

O Father, quicken in us
Thy Holy Spirit to create
From darkness, light;
From chaos, order;
From hatred, love;
From death, hope of life eternal.

O Merciful Father,
We pray for all Thy children
In the name of our Blessed Redeemer.
Amen.

1968

In 1968, I was one of nine teachers initiated into Kappa Chapter of The Delta Kappa Gamma Society International. Since we had been asked to provide a program, we planned a drama in which each of us would portray a character–a teacher, a pioneer, a mother, a friend, a professor, a machine, a shadow, a flower child, and a missionary. I wrote a verse drama titled Kaleidoscope, read it aloud, and made a tape recording of the reading with music and sound effects. The other new members and I dressed for our chosen roles and enacted them as the tape recording played. The production was so successful that we were asked to perform at a district meeting the same year and to stage a revival in 1990. The poem below introduces the main character, Laura, who is dreaming by the fire.

Laura

Blow and bluster, January gale,
And weep at all my windows, weep and wail.
I do not mind your moaning, moaning more,
Those dolorous chromatics at my door.

Why should I care about a winter storm
When I can close my draperies all warm
And light my fire and bolt my storm-door tight?
How heavenly to be at home tonight!

Such unaccustomed leisure seems to me
As near to Heaven as I'm like to be–
At least for some time yet. (We teachers know
A fair share of the troubles down below.)

I wonder if *this* fire can purify?
Caught by a spirit wind, it blazes high
And sings its cedar, pine, and hickory song
Of winter when the dream-bright nights are long.

I love to gaze into the fire and dream
While colors of a lifetime glow and gleam:
Past scenes, and present, and my future hope–
A never-twice-the-same kaleidoscope.

And yet does life, I wonder, burn too fast
From leaping flame to ember at the last?
Do these kaleidoscopic patterns pass
Illusory like broken mirror glass?

No, life's real enough, as real as fire
To keep us warm or kindle our desire.
My great-grandmother seemed to me austere,
But O fire burned in her, a pioneer!

1968

In my verse play Kaleidoscope (1968), "Passions of Youth" is a chaotic reminiscence by Laura's girlhood friend. Do you recall similar experiences?

Passions of Youth

Why did we want to scare ourselves on the Ferris wheel?
Clinging to the bar of the buggy, we zoomed to the zenith and hung there,
swinging and laughing in a dazzle of lights and dangers.

You and I scooped oceans in wet sand
or buried each other to the tips of our sunburned noses.

Weren't we a sight?—braving kindergarten with our Dutch-boy haircuts
and new dresses our mamas made with bloomers to match.
We cut white paper lace for hearts as red as cherries and slipped valentines into *all* the children's boxes, as directed by our mamas, even though we didn't like Bobby much.
It turned out he wasn't stuck-up after all.

What rowdies we were, romping with our brothers and the neighborhood gang
in *Dodge-ball*, *Sardines*, and, best of all, *Murder*!
We skated on the smoothest sidewalks we could find or
scampered away from a cackling witch on Halloween
We stumbled through the first duet of your uncertain piano and my windy flute.
It wasn't fun to be spotty and itchy with chicken pox, especially in separate houses.
At slumber parties we sneaked chipped beef and crumbly crackers into my bed and told funny stories until Daddy said, "All right, girls, that's enough giggling for one night."

Our mamas made us labor like sorry apprentices to sew a seam or dust the furniture.
I thought your voice sounded angelic when we sang with carolers through a veil of snow.
(I would have given anything to sing like you!)
Our daddies taught us how to fish and climb a cliff and read the children's library,
shelf by magic shelf.
We liked to walk home from school with our favorite teacher, the one who let us write the play, "S.O.S—Safety or Sorrow," with parts for all the seventh graders. We read it on the radio and were famous!

Fame evaporated. We became lowly freshmen in the three-story high school. Upperclassmen tried to sell us elevator tickets—though, of course, there wasn't an elevator.
When our horses ran away, you fell off and broke your leg. All the freshmen and even a few sophomores signed your "Cast of Characters."
I tooted my flute in the band for football games, and you soloed in the concert choir.
Weren't we sophisticated, taking algebra, Latin, and chemistry? You accomplished homework on time and earned grades that made your parents proud.
I, the procrastinator, entered essay contests instead. Wasn't it nice of Mom and Dad to let me use

the prize money to buy a typewriter and a dog? Ting romped after us everywhere,
but, sad to say, I couldn't stop him from chasing motorcycles.

You and I seriously studied BOYS—the Romeos we admired from afar
and the good old friends who carried our books.
Remember those classes in ballroom dancing and the frilly dresses we wore to our first prom?
On a May evening in the high school auditorium, our teachers presented us with diplomas rolled
and tied with crimson bows. To the strains of "Pomp and Circumstance,"
we marched away forever.

If Charles Dickens had gone to college with us in the late 1930's, he would have called *those*
years the worst and best of times.
Remember rush parties, bonfires, scavenger hunts, snake dances, varsity games, and
jellying with our friends at Riggles'?
Remember operas and plays and visiting poets and art exhibits and symphony concerts?
We thought a certain theme in Schubert needed a thousand violins, but if we had heard them,
we would have died, simply died!
Our saddle shoes walked us from class to class to learn from professors who seemed impossibly
erudite at first.
On better acquaintance, they became surprisingly human and humorous and inspiring.
We researched and memorized volumes of data for papers and examinations, yet somehow
acquired a bit of expertise and a modicum of wisdom serviceable in the long run.
Passionately we declared for human rights and disarmament and lasting peace!
Remember my brothers with their big band playing "Deep Purple" and "Dipsy Doodle" and
"Stardust" with a romanticism never to be matched again?
Remember my little sister taking our breath away with the piano music she composed?

O the fragrance of linden trees filling the campus on spring nights!
O the moonlight streaming across Lake Cena!
O those ardent young men so worthy of respect and love!
All too soon came Commencement and adult responsibilities and hideous war.
We could hardly bear to look at our young husbands,
so embraceable, so dear beyond words, yet already ordered away.

Yes, my friend, the years of our youth spun like a Ferris wheel
whirling us from depths of certainty to giddy heights...
immutable in glory...
ephemeral as a rose.

1968

In the verse drama Kaleidoscope, one of the characters Laura imagines in the flames of her hearth fire is her great-grandmother, a pioneer.

Pioneer

Virginia-bred, I was not used to toil
When John and I moved west to virgin soil;
Yet here we built a cabin, took our stand,
And labored, fought, and prayed to hold this land.

You are no great-granddaughter I would claim,
You are not worthy of the family name
Unless you keep your purpose strong and whole–
Flint to strike the iron within your soul.

Laura

I wish you knew how often I have blessed
You, Great-Grandmother, for your stern behest...

I see another face of long ago,
Not in a flame, but in a radiant glow
As soft as evensong, as full of grace
With lovelight in her eyes–my mother's face.

Soft humming of lullaby. Mother appears in firelight, cradling her arms as if holding a baby. She is a woman of radiance and grace, wearing a simple house-dress. She sings a lullaby.

1968

The character of the Mother in my verse play Kaleidoscope (1990) speaks several times about her children at different stages in their lives. This poem gives her thoughts about the eagerness and playfulness of her children as youngsters. (Obviously I had in mind the wonderful children and grandchildren in our own family, too.)

Hello, World

Into the azure morning
My eager children run
Light-footed in the west wind
And golden in the sun.

I think, dear hearts, my childhood
Held wonder like your own,
But greater is the wonder
Now that I am grown.

Away up to the hilltop
My bonny children go
And fling their arms wide calling
"Hello, World! Hello!"

1968

Probably every loving mother has wished she could keep forever a favorite experience with her children. I wrote this poem about 1965 and repeated it in my verse play Kaleidoscope (printed and produced in 1968 and 1990). In the play the Mother speaks over symphonic music.

A Moment of Eternity

I save one changeless moment from the sweep
And undertow of thy dark river, Time,
To hear tumultuous feet and slamming door,
And treble voices calling, "Mom, we're home!"
To see the children, lithe as poplar trees,
Sun-warmed and radiant with welcoming,
And thus to clasp them joyfully once more!
Take empires, Time, take continents or stars:
I have my moment of Eternity.

1968

One of the characters in my verse play Kaleidoscope is a machine. In performances for Delta Kappa Gamma, this character was portrayed by Reese Danley-Kilgo in 1968 and by Sandra Norton in 1990. Wearing a robotic costume of aluminum-covered boxes and blinking lights and speaking in a metallic voice, the Machine represents teachers' worst fears of the electronic revolution. The Machine's taunting speech was also printed in the 1971 volume of our city-wide English curriculum project, Space City English.

The Machine

Teacher, are you ready for the cybernetic age?
Even primitive computers compute
That knowledge is exploding
And the population is exploding,
And if you're not careful, Teacher,
The world will explode as well!

Are you master of the audio-visuals,
Or are you wrapped in record tape and ticker tape
and Scotch tape and red tape?
Bigger and better teaching machines are on the way
Even though you don't always have a classroom and
textbooks.

Consider the chaste beauty of the moon–Diana.
We are sending her Apollo.
Named for the god of youth and manly beauty,
God of poetry, music, and the oracles,
Also god of healing.
Apollo–most appropriate!
Let us hope there is no confusion with Apollyon,
Angel of the bottomless pit.

Teacher, what are you teaching about air pollution
and water pollution and mind pollution?
And say, who should be appointed to the Board for
Genetic Change?

Before we rocket off to Venus in our pillar of fire,
What are you going to do, Teacher, about Earth?

1968

Another character in my verse play Kaleidoscope is the Flower Child, portrayed by Helen Caudle in the 1968 production and by Susan Sullins in the 1990 production. To happy ballad music, the Flower Child dances in. She is a pretty and careless young woman, wearing hippie clothes and, of course, flowers.

Flower Child

Turn 'em on, turn 'em on,
for a sunny hour.
Turn the psychedelics on
and wear a pretty flower.

Flower children tell you why
we are never sad,
Never have been known to cry,
but are always glad.

Truly we love everyone–
every father's daughter,
Yes, and every mother's son–
everyone we oughter.

Peacefully we live and love,
protesting guns and bombs,
also shoes and shaving mugs
and baths and Peeping Toms.

You parents and you teachers make
us really want to flip,
but send our checks for LSD;
we'll take a quiet trip.

Laura's Comment

Who can object to psychedelic stars?
To flowers, love and peace, and sweet guitars?
But children of all ages dropping out
Encumber the society they flout.

Like all the world, I need a truer light
To lift the shadow from my soul tonight,
And here is one last image in the flame–
A saint by any name would be the same. *(The missionary enters.)*

In Kaleidoscope, my verse play, the last of the eight characters seen by Laura in the fire is a missionary. She is dressed plainly for her work in the tropics, but she is nevertheless remarkable for the light of dedication in her face.

Missionary

I am quite an ordinary woman,
But I saw extraordinary need.
One summer years ago I meant to tour
The world, but went no farther than a slum.

I saw the hungry children, paper-thin,
With swollen bellies and enormous eyes.
I saw the tattered rags they wore for clothes,
The rat-infested hovels they called home,
Rain-gutted roads where they stood listlessly,
And rubble that had been a mission school.

They needed me; I simply could not leave
Despite dire warnings from officialdom.
I used my travel money first, and then
I begged and borrowed from my friends at home.
God bless the hearts that heeded through the years!

What is a life fulfilled? For me it is
Each child set free from hunger and from pain,
Who proudly wears clean cotton pants and shirt,
Who learns to read and write his native tongue,
And who responds with bright and hopeful eyes.

I shall not rashly oversimplify
Our task of teaching in this world today;
But wheresoever human needs may lie,
One Master Teacher guides us all the way. *(She exits to religious music.)*

Laura's Final Speech

The storm is over. Time to go to bed
With all these dreams and wonders in my head.

O fire so filled with images tonight,
Kaleidoscope of mystical delight,
I love your changing colors, and I pray
God merges them in pure white light someday. *(Music rises. Exit.)*

1970

In many of my verses, including this one written about 1970, I choose words with vocal imitations of sounds associated with meaning. Although I like onomatopoeia, I sometimes think, "Why not just roll a drum instead of straining to imitate its sound with onomatopoeic words?"

Rhapsody of Spring

Hearken to the rhapsody of spring.
Roll the kettledrums of thunder.
Roll and rip the clouds asunder.
Pluck the rain on pizzicato string.

Hearken to the wild horns of the gale
Over lonely meadows moaning,
Over bending boughs intoning
Haunting harmony and shriek and wail.

Hearken how the fanfare blares and stills.
The sun in warm cadenza falls
Down the flowering garden walls
Brightening the brook that glides and trills.

Hearken to the flute notes of a bird,
Pure as snow-white blooms of cherry,
Bidding every soul be merry
Who the rhapsody of spring has heard.

Through the years I have written a number of plays which have been presented to audiences. Among these are a musical play for the senior class of the high school in Peculiar, Missouri; children's musical plays for Countryside Methodist Church, Kansas City, Missouri; a historical pageant twice produced at First United Methodist Church, Huntsville, Alabama; four TV programs showing how FUMC families observe Advent; The Time Box, written with Georg von Tiesenhausen, a dramatization of Huntsville High School history with 200 student actors and musicians; and Kaleidoscope, a musical play on values for living. In addition, I have written rough drafts of two other musical plays. The verse below is "The Golden Mean," title song for a play about Austin Doane, an egotistical business man and "compassionate conservative," whose wife, daughter, and best friend do not wholly agree with him.

The Golden Mean
(Sung by Austin Doane)

I like to think that I
Follow the golden mean,
Neither the low nor the high
But the level road between.

I march with measured pace,
Beating the drums of Time.
I leave to fools the race
And the long, toiling climb.

I never say, "Do or die,"
But simply do what I can.
My followers say that I
Am a most practical man.

1970

In my musical play <u>*The Golden Mean*</u>*, teen-age Deirdre Doane loves her father but does not agree with his stance as a so-called "compassionate conservative." Like her mother, she admires his best friend, an honestly liberal and heroic man. The following is one of Deirdre's songs, first written about 1970 and recently revised.*

Deirdre's Song

The dream I dream is too extreme–
Beyond my touch.
It seems to be my destiny
To dream too much.

Against my father's will my will
Has no redoubt.
The self-same wind that fans a flame
May blow it out.

I have a dream but I am such
A fool to dream it,
For how can I redeem it?
I dream, I dream, I dream too much.

1970

Emma Lou Diemer, composer, and her sister Dorothy Diemer Hendry, poet, collaborated on several songs for New Dimensions in Music, American Book Company, in 1970. This is one about a pinto earned with baby-sitting money by Bonny Hendry, the youngest of the Hendry children. Fortunately, Bonny's feisty pony did not really run away forever. He was cherished by the Hendrys for many years.

Geronimo

Left in his pasture walking slow
My little pinto Geronimo
Eyed the place where the wire sagged low.
Laying back his ears, ready to go,
He fled in a canter like a river flow
And left me forever–Geronimo–
Left me forever–Geronimo.

1970

Several of Emma Lou Diemer's songs for children were published in New Dimensions in Music, American Book Company, 1970. She used verses of mine about children's experiences on an ocean beach.

Conch Shell

I like to hold my conch shell,
Magic as can be,
Lined with pink and purple
Like sunrise on the sea.

I listen to its roaring–
An ocean all my own.
I can even blow it–
A ship in fog alone.

Hermit Crab

Hermit crab, shame on you!
You fed yourself too well.

You must scrabble in the sand
To find a bigger shell.

Do you want a moonshell dome
Or periwinkle roof?

Next time do not eat so much.
You are a silly goof!

Round

Mind your manners,
Mind your manners,
Mister Crab,
Mister Crab.
People's toes are not your dinner,
People's toes are not your dinner.
Don't grab!
Don't grab!

Odd Fish

The oddest fish I ever saw
Had whiskers and a clumsy tail.
I caught him at the water's edge
And meant to keep him in my pail.

To my surprise, he puckered up
And stared with sad fish-eyes at me,
And when he whimpered like a pup,
I plopped him back into the sea.

Tide Pool

Do you
want to be
sun-warm and water-cool
wading in the tidal pool?
Lucky you!
Come with me.

Beachcombers

You and I are beachcombers
Rich beyond measure,
Pockets full of jingle shells
And sand dollar treasure.

1973

Allen Hyatt was a dedicated and well-loved principal at Huntsville High School. The faculty hosted a dinner in his honor and entertained with skits, popular songs, and this ballad. We teachers and our guests provided bells for the chorus by tapping spoons on water glasses.

Ballad with Bells

Chorus for All:

For Allen Hyatt, ring the bells!
Ring them loud and long!
Ding! Ding! Ding! Ding!
Dong! Dong! Dong!

Leader:

When the Twentieth Century
was only ten years old,
a boy was born to bless us all
with more than gifts of gold!

He thought it good to be alive,
this Alabama boy.
He hailed all bright blue mornings
with eagerness and joy.

Chorus for All

Leader:

He hunted in the high green hills
and fished from river brim.
He thought that God had made the world
to challenge boys like him.

Other boys might lie abed
until the sun came out,
but rain or shine he cycled miles
to run his paper route.

Chorus for All

Leader:

He never bragged of scholarship;
yet in his modest way,
he learned of life and men and God
far more than books can say.

Then in his early manhood with
the whole world in his reach,
he found the purpose of his life:
his calling was to teach.

Chorus for All

Leader:

We know him as a man who cares
for all within his school,
a man who labors to improve
each teaching skill and tool.

We know him as a man who loves
his home and family;
yet he will travel far and wide
to serve humanity.

Chorus for All

1975

This poem, written in the 1970's, could be about the Confederate lost cause or could be about the sad aftermath of any war when men we love "never can come home again." I used rhythms suggested by one of Thomas Wolfe's poems.

Lost Cause

And time still passing...
petals fade and fall...
time passing...
twilight dims to dark...
time passing...
we mourn men who never
can come home again.

Come to us, Father, while
earth trembles in blackness,
for we are blind... lost... moorless...
if you do not come...
and our souls, borne by the hurricane,
are hurled with thunder and
lightning toward the sea.

1975

"Why the Chimes Rang" is a well-known and well-loved Christmas story by Raymond MacDonald Alden. In 1975 I wrote the following song lyrics suggested by the story.

Why the Chimes Rang

Pilgrims' Carol:

On this Christmas Eve betimes
We hasten through the snow
Listening for cathedral chimes
That rang long, long ago.

If an altar offering
Be some Heaven-treasured thing,
Then the Christmas chimes will ring.

Little Brother's Prayer:

Lead your little pilgrim, Lord,
All this cold, dark way.
Pedro knew just where to go,
But he had to stay
To help the poor, sick woman
Fallen in the snow.

I wish *he* could hear chimes ring!
Please help me bring our offering
And see, for Pedro, everything.

Processional:

Before His altar praise Him and behold
The grand procession of the rich and bold.
Attend! The lady lays her jewels down.
The poet gives his book; the king, his crown.
Is there a sound from that high-towering stone?
A chime? No, only barren winds that moan.

But soft! While people turn away and sigh,
Little Brother slips unheeded by
To bless the altar with his coin of love....
What glory stirs and fills the spires above?
What joy streams down like Heaven's angels singing?
The chimes! The chimes! The Christmas chimes are ringing!

1978

In 1978, I took a six-weeks leave of absence from my teaching duties at Huntsville High School in order to finish a textbook project for Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. Louise Heidish, a capable teacher, taught my students. The students in Creative Writing sent me endearing letters, brought me refreshments, and asked me to write a poem for them.

Thank You!

To my surprise, I was your guest
Last Friday afternoon
As though I'd climbed Mount Everest
Or soloed to the moon.

You brought a cake abloom with roses,
Kegs of Kool-Ade, too.
I hope this rhyme of mine discloses
How fond I am of you.

Melissa, Donna, Laura, Larry,
Steve-Anna, Jamie, John,
Both Kathys, Amy, Kim, and Harry–
The roll goes on and on

With Paula, Stewart, Mike, and Steve,
With Sandy, Mark, and Kevin:
A lucky teacher could believe
This is a roll for Heaven

Or else for Room One-Thirty-Four,
Creative Writing Class,
Where rhymes of mine may fail to score,
But <u>you</u> will surely pass!

P.S.
If publishers would let me write
A dedication page,
I wouldn't name some noble knight
Or diplomat or sage.

My book forever would recall
My Huntsville High School classes:
"To you, dear students, one and all,
Whom no one else surpasses."

1980

Like many other teachers of English, I admire good teachers of mathematics. They seem to be so sure of their mathematics discipline and so exacting in their teaching, a state not always appropriate in the teaching of literature and composition. I wrote this poem about 1980.

Teacher of Mathematics

Over the tempestuous
river of our youth
she arched a bridge of steel
measured faithfully
to the last millimicron
so that we could pass over
with sure feet and
a smile like hers
almost expecting order
on the other side.

1980

After being assigned range of motion exercises as a treatment for arthritis, I discovered that our living room and study looked quite different from my supine position. Here is light verse describing the sensations. I wrote it about 1980.

Range of Motion

Supine on the blue rug,
I let my eyes
wander
back along the ceiling,
vault
the fountain of a chandelier and
collide
with a wall of books.
Hundreds of books
hanging
from mahogany shelves
shake
with gales of laughter at
this topsy-turvy world
until I
(not without regret)
rise
to my feet and
restore
the law of gravity.

1980

This verse, written in 1980, contains the names of sixteen varieties of roses. Do you grow some of them–and give them to loved ones? Love and roses have helped each other for thousands of years.

Love with Roses

Carefree Beauty, I care for you,
The queen Pristine of roses.
When I behold your Angel Face,
My soul in Peace reposes.

Over the Rainbow, Mon Cheri,
Come to my Garden Party.
Sip the Summerwine with me
For Happy Talk and hearty.

Little Darling of Paradise,
My Love will never perish.
I Promise you with Double Delight,
Ever to Honor and Cherish.

1981

Wick and the children and I drove to Holt, Kentucky, for the funeral of his dear mother, Ida Hendry. When we arrived at the family farm, Wick's sisters asked me to write a memorial poem and read it at the service the following morning. This poem wrote itself. It mentions train whistles because engineers of passing trains blew their whistles for Wick's father in honor of his long career with the Railway Mail Service. Pam (quoted in the third stanza) is the daughter of Wick's sister Louise. The river is the beautiful Ohio.

A Proper Lady

From many odysseys we gather here
to honor one whose world was home.
She never needed Anchorage or Rome,
ocean voyages or flights in space
because she loved these golden fields descending
to the rolling river with its boats and barges,
the wooded hills below the sunset or the moon,
and trains that rumbled in the night
and always blew their whistles plaintively for Papa.

Yes, here she lived and loved:
first a sprite named Ida,
red hair flying as she ran
to tell her mother of the newest
fluffy chicks or wobbly calf;
next a talented young lady; a pristine bride;
and in due course, the caring mother of a splendid son
and three high-spirited daughters who grew to be
as fair and strong and lovely as herself.

In four score and eleven years,
many roles she played to perfection.
As Pam has said, "She was a proper lady,"
doing for us all, embracing us all,
family and friends,
her voice and laughter resonant
and warm as sunlight on this Kentucky world—
Ida of the shining and eternal spirit.

1982

Light verse is fun to write. I realize that this sample, written about 1982, is not nearly so funny as light verse I've enjoyed from other poets. Well, anyway, I tried.

Continuing Education

You might learn to soar like an eagle
and leap like a kangaroo
and bay at the moon like a beagle
while being essentially you.
Flap-flap, hop-hop, a-wooooooooooooooo!
Such a remarkable you!

I might learn to dive like a dolphin
and sing like a chickadee
and swing in the trees like a monkey
while being essentially me.
Blub-blub, tweet-tweet, a-weeeeeeeeeeeeee!
Such a remarkable me!

1982

For the past thirty years, Wick and I have been members of the Huntsville-Twickenham Rose Society, an affiliate of the American Rose Society. In 1982-3, when I served as president, we printed this verse in our yearbook.

Rose Gardeners

Little we mind our
sunburned noses,
knee-patched jeans, and
wind-tossed hair,
for much we love our
gardens of roses
with beauty and fragrance and
friendship to share.

1982

The six stanzas of "Life Is Holy," written about 1982, were spoken as a litany by the minister and congregation of First United Methodist Church. After each stanza the refrain was sung by the church choir, accompanied by Kenneth Turvey, organist. Emma Lou Diemer composed music for the refrain, and Dorothy Diemer Hendry wrote the text.

Life Is Holy

I.
Who will save the wild September
Apple tang and maple glow,
Thunder-drum and silver arrow
Shot from iridescent bow?
Refrain: Life is holy! Life is worth
Being merciful to Earth!

II.
Who will save the breath of April,
Robin-merry, soft as dove,
Blowing whitely in the dogwood,
Fragrant with the voice of love? *Refrain*

III.
Who will save the azure water
Falling sheer from dazzled snow,
Flowing deep in prairie grass for
Wapiti and buffalo? *Refrain*

IV.
Who will save the sky for eagles,
Crag for thousand-year-old pine,
Lair for timber wolf or grizzly,
Mossy bed for columbine? *Refrain*

V.
Who will save a baby smiling,
Planned and privileged from birth,
Cradled in the arms that need him–
None unloved in all of Earth? *Refrain*

VI.
Who will save good Nature's balance,
Over-tipped by human greed?
Be a better Eve and Adam
Gardening God's golden seed? *Refrain*

1985

In October, 1985, I compiled a booklet of poems by Emily Dickinson and made fifty copies so that we members of the Huntsville Literary Association could read and talk about the poems in one of our soirees. I ended the booklet with a brief poem of my own. It is a pale shadow of Emily's work, of course, but it imitates her punctuation and subject matter. This tribute to her was published in the Higginson Journal, Brentwood, Maryland, in 1987.

Emily

Unwilling–to be printed–
Unwanting–to be heard–
The Queen of Amherst waited
On honeybee and bird.

Her verse–some found–eccentric–
With all the Truth aslant
On helter-skelter rainbows
Of rhyme by accident.

Our Queen dispatched armadas
To breast the seas within
The fragile shores of self–
Or God! Where *hath* He been?

1986

My husband Wick and I toured Mexico in the spring of 1986. After seeing a stone statue of the Aztec deity Xochipilli in the Mexican National Museum, we attended the magnificent folklore ballet in Mexico City. We sent a letter of appreciation and this poem to the founding director, Amalia Hernandez. She responded in her own hand, "Mas gracias por tus bellas palabras."

To a Mexican Prince

Xochipilli, prince of fragrant flowers,
patron of the ever-flowing dance,
are you captured in this cage of stone?

An Aztec artisan with brawny arms
caught you whirling on the sunlit hills
and sought to hold you for eternity.

Artful man! He carved your figure well–
face upturned, hands beseeching heaven,
leg muscles taut as though about to spring.

The pious toiled up teocalli stairs
to placate mightier gods with gems and blood
but decked your humble image with their flowers.

Conquistadores came and killed for gold
and stayed to raze all temples but their own;
yet people still revered you, Xochipilli.

This antique sculpture with a broken nose,
exhumed from rubble for a state museum,
has never held Your Grace and never will,

for you are dancing in the thousand lights
of El Palacio de Bellas Artes
and sharing lilting songs and fragrant flowers.

1986

After shopping and sightseeing all day in the picturesque Mexican town of Taxco, Wick and I rode the lift up the mountain to our hotel. In the upstairs hall near our room we saw a sign in both Spanish and English with a courteous reminder to noisy revelers: "Silence is the perfect treasure."

Love in Taxco

Iron bells in pink-stone towers of the Church of Santa Prisca
pealed an endless exhortation: "Pray now...buy now...pray now...buy now...."

Sunday was a market day in the mining town of Taxco.
Artists worked the silver here while other artists worked the tourists.

We wore rugged boots to rove through silver shops in cobbled alleys;
likewise we wore rugged hearts to bargain for some silver treasure.

Rugged hearts? Not really rough enough to pass on by the swarms of
barefoot children peddling wares around the flowered village plaza.

"Pray now...buy now"...woven baskets, wooden whistles, painted burros,
hand-embroidered peasant blouses, flower pots, and bright serapes.

We old softies lost our hearts to those dark eyes and dulcet voices
begging us to change their woe to laughter with a few centavos.

With our piles of packages, we took the lift up Monte Taxco.
Would the creaking cable snap, spilling us and all our treasures?

Gracias a Dios! Safe at last in our hotel! We dined like
Mexicanos, danced as merrily, and sang along with mariachis.

Later, love, sequestered on our balcony above the garden,
we divined that moonlight overwhelms the headiest scent of flowers.

Far below, too far to hear, old Taxco limned the night with pearls,
while among our pale gardenias, silence was the perfect treasure.

1986

Wick and I enjoyed the pleasures of tourism in Mexico and other lands, but sometimes we felt a twinge of Puritan conscience.

Gringos

In the coolness of our thatched palapa
on the oval shores of Acapulco,
we sit and gaze in hedonistic ease.
Mile on golden mile, beached bodies lie
not wholly dead, but somnolent as seals
gleaming in the celebrated sun.

Children dig their watery wells in sand
or run to meet the curling waves and scream
a reedy descant to the roar of surf.
Flotillas dip and rise on wind and tide
and flash their whiteness on the sapphire bay
below a choreography of gulls.

Bannered for a festival of song
and revelry, the *Princess* passes by,
decks jam-packed with gringos bound to see
the haciendas clinging to the cliffs,
hideaways of gringo royalty—
The Duke, Old Blue Eyes, and perennial Liz.

A slim young waiter brings our margaritas.
He bows to us and smiles enchantingly:
"Salud, amigos." Then he slips away.
I touch my tongue to salt and think of sun—
hot sun burning backs of Mexicans
who strip Agave tequilana leaves.

When was I ever hospitable to *them*?
Back home Chicanos (ragged fellows) worked
at that nice greenhouse up in Madison.
I took them for illegal aliens
but tipped them for the cheerful way they put
my lovely bougainvillea in my car.

I wonder if I thought *Noblesse oblige*?
Sometimes I do not like myself at all.

1987

In the 1980's we American women campaigned for equal rights. At the same time, we felt concern for men and boys, as well as for women and girls. This brief poem was published in The Higginson Journal, Brentwood, Maryland, 1987.

All of Us

I wanted a woman to tell me,

I wanted a woman to trace

The innocent power adorning

Our prelapsarian race.

But when one cried for a brother

And when one sang by the Rhine,

The whole proud dazzle of people

Brewed ineffable wine.

1987

"Celebrate the Journey" is a hymn with text by Dorothy Diemer Hendry and music for congregation and choir by Emma Lou Diemer. It was written in 1987 and is being published in 2003 by the Zimbel Press, Webster, New York.

Celebrate the Journey

Celebrate the journey as God wills–
Pray in valleys, sing on hills!
Dear companions, joined by grace,
Walk with God in joyful pace.

Celebrate the pilgrims of our past.
Strong enough in faith to last
Through all trials beneath the sun.
They endured–and Heaven won!

Fallen by the highway, we despair.
Who will find us? Who will care?
If we help each broken soul,
God redeems and makes us whole.

Consecrate the future to God's call.
Journey gladly, all for all,
Toward the Kingdom that God wills.
Pray in valleys! Sing on hills!

1987

As an enthusiastic member of the Huntsville-Twickenham Rose Society and the American Rose Society for the past thirty years, I have written many rose articles, poems, and prayers. This time capsule poem was written in 1987, the year that the Rose became our National Floral Emblem.

American Roses

40,000,000 B.C.

Where ancient rivers overflowed the plain
and buried flowers in alluvium,
the fossil beds of Florissant reveal
impressions of the perfect leaves of roses.
Wild roses, sweet ancestral roses, bloomed
for honeybees and wandering winds to sow
the land that would become America.

1492 A.D.

Their ships becalmed in the Sargasso Sea,
Columbus and his weary men prayed for
a sign of land. They hailed with shouts of joy
a drifting branch of rose-hips red as fire,
the promise of an inflorescent shore.

1607

Observant Captain John Smith explored
the fertile valley of the James and saw
that native tribes were planting corn and squash
and wild pink roses "to make their campsites fair."

1620

The Pilgrims wanted European plants.
As Edward Winslow wrote, they all agreed
to grow "an abundance of roses, white, red,
and damask, single, but very sweete indeed."

1796

Returning to Mount Vernon, home at last,
the Father of Our Country hybridized
from Old and New World stock a lovely rose
named for his mother, Mary Washington.

All Times

O migrant women, pioneers as strong
and hopeful as your men, how often have
you lost a treasured garden and old home
and braved a wilderness with silent tears?
You carried with you to the unknown land
the seeds and cuttings for another start
of cherished fruit trees, vegetables, and flowers.
You told your stories in the heirloom quilts,
the baby dresses, and the needlepoint
with patterns of the roses you loved best.

1902

What does a garden mean to someone deaf
and blind? Our neighbor Helen Keller said,
"These are the vivid moments among so many
flat ones." She enjoyed "the velvety touch"
of roses and their great "outburst of Persian glory"
when all the different fragrances would sing
and "mingle in a symphony of delight."

1945

He did not live to see the rose named *Peace*
although his patronymic meant a "field
of roses." All around the world were fields
of barren stones incised with fifty million names,
compatriotic names we loved and mourned
and names of strangers, erstwhile enemies,
as deeply loved and mourned in their own lands.

What could we do but kneel and weep and pray
beside those barren stones? What could we do

but vow our heroes' dream would never die?
The freedom of the world! We pledged to work
with people everywhere in quest of freedom
of speech and worship, freedom from want and fear.
We covered our sad fields of barren stones
with flowing colors of immortal life:
Old Glory and the new white rose called *Peace.*

1983

Our youngest grandson, not yet three,
keeps a rite of spring with me,
digging holes with all his might
for Mister Lincoln and Double Delight.
When the roses bud and bloom,
they will yield our grandson room
to clamber up the garden wall
and be the fairest rose of all.

1986

Our Congress and our President have passed
belatedly a law to name the Rose
Our National Floral Emblem; but we know
it always has been such! To show our true
respect, we gardeners will go on home
and mix more sand and humus in the loam.

Today

We need the roses of America
to make ourselves more sapient of Earth
and all the diverse glories of creation.
Our roses carry chains of DNA
and grace the gorgeous tapestry of life.

When stately towers fall, we mourn and try
again to build a civil world. We know
that vengeance on fanatic terrorists
is not enough. The greater work remains:
to win the cause of universal freedom
and live in balance with the natural world.

Americans, we must not hesitate
to share our knowledge and material wealth.
Let's give and take the roses to invoke
the answering beauty deep in every soul;
for otherwise, who can say for sure
that humankind, like roses, will endure?

40,000,000 A.D.

Who digs for ancient bones of dinosaurs
and *Homo sapiens*? Do happy breeds
of near-angelic beings dwell on Earth
and breathe the timeless fragrances of roses?

1988

This was written as an American variation of A.B. (*"Banjo") Patterson's famous ballad, "Waltzing Matila." It was sung by all members of Elderhostel Group 30076 to thank Australian hosts, who received it with enthusiastic applause. Aren't the Aussies grand!*

American Variation of "Waltzing Matilda"

Once a jolly Yankee jetted to Aus-tral-i-a
Raring to go on an Elderhostel spree,
And he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boiled,
"Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?"

Chorus by Banjo Patterson:
Waltzing Matilda, waltzing Matilda,
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me,
And he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boiled,
"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me."

Down came a jolly bus loaded with Americans;
Up jumped the Yankee to board it with glee.
"Where are the Aussies to lead us on this holiday?
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me." *Chorus*

Up stood the Aussies dinkum as a wattle tree,
All ridgy didge and beaut as could be:
"G'day to you Yankees. Ready for a walkabout?
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me." *Chorus*

So the jolly Yankee journeyed in the land of Oz,
Happy to be on that Elderhostel spree.
(*Softly)* As he said a fond goodbye, he brushed a teardrop from his eye,
"You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me." *Chorus*

Australian Words

billy: metal container with fitted lid and handle used as a bushman's kettle
dinkum: real, genuine
ridgy didge: the real thing, genuine article
beaut: excellent, marvelous
walkabout: aboriginal term that means to go wandering
Oz: Australia
Matilda: identified by some Australians as the swag or bundle carried by a swagman (hobo)

1989

We Americans can't help becoming cynical about the machinations and hypocrisy of rival political parties. Names change, but the pot still calls the kettle black. This verse satirizes both sides in a controversy over John Towers in 1989.

Practical Politics

John is said to guzzle Scotch,
shocking you and me.
The rest of us in Washington
only sip our tea.

John is said to womanize,
making rumors fly.
Who says our women manize, too?
It's a dirty lie!

John is said to welcome bribes.
What a Towering sin!
The rest of us take just enough to
bring elections in.

1990

Probably the most widely sung of our collaborations (my words, Emma Lou Diemer's music) is "Christian Women, Christian Men," first published in The Presbyterian Hymnal, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1990.

Christian Women, Christian Men

Christian women, Christian men,
Have we ears to hear
The crying of a homeless child
Hungry and in fear?
In the name of Jesus, yes,
We have ears to hear!
In the name of Jesus, yes,
We hear! We hear!

Down a grimy city street
Have we eyes to see
The faces of the aged and ill
Lost in poverty?
In the name of Jesus, yes,
We have eyes to see!
In the name of Jesus, yes,
We see! We see!

When Satanic gloom assails,
Have we strength to hold
The fortress of our living faith
Till God's day dawns gold?
In the name of Jesus, yes,
We have strength to hold!
In the name of Jesus, yes,
We hold! We hold!

Christian women, Christian men,
Have we hearts to love
Our neighbors as we love ourselves,
Serving God above?
In the name of Jesus, yes,
We have hearts to love!
In the name of Jesus, yes,
We love! We love!

1990

The Holy Child is a cantata for Christmas with music by Emma Lou Diemer and narrative and texts by Dorothy Diemer Hendry. It is sung by mixed voices (SATB) accompanied by organ or piano, with optional children's choir and congregation, flute, synthesizer, and percussions. The solos are sung by soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone, and bass. A narrator reads the prose text telling the story of Christ's birth. The cantata premiered in the First United Methodist Church, Huntsville, Alabama, with the Chancel Choir, directed by Kenneth V. Turvey, organist. Written at the suggestion of Dale Wood and Geoffrey Lorenz of The Sacred Music Press, the cantata is a beautifully formatted publication of The Sacred Music Press, Dayton, Ohio, 1990.

After the choir and congregation sing the familiar hymn "O Come, O come, Emmanuel," the organ plays the Prelude, followed by the chorus singing "Journey, Christian Pilgrims."

Journey, Christmas Pilgrims

Journey, Christmas pilgrims,
Though the road be wild,
Though the wind is piercing,
Seek the Holy Child.
Alleluia! Fear allay!
Alleluia! Bless the day!

Brave the savage country;
Brave the cold of space;
Hoping, ever hoping
We will see his face.
Alleluia! Fear allay!
Alleluia! Bless the day!

Cast away the tinsel;
Cast away the sin.
Kneel in prayer and silence,
Wonder to begin.
Alleluia! Fear allay!
Alleluia! Bless the day!

Mystery of ages,
Born on Christmas Day,
Word of God incarnate,
Come to us, we pray.
Alleluia! Fear allay!
Alleluia! Bless the day!

In the cantata <u>The Holy Child</u>, a baritone soloist, taking the role of a young shepherd, sings "How Can I Know You, God?" A male chorus joins him in the final lines.

How Can I Know You, God?

How can I know you, God?
I touch the grass of your earth,
but cannot touch your hand.
I gaze on the shining moon and stars,
but cannot see your eyes.
I listen to your crying lambs,
but cannot hear your voice.
Might I know you in fragrance
of lilies of the field?
In taste of honey on brown bread?
Or in the pulsing river of my blood?
You are God Almighty,
Maker of all things wonderful
under the sun,
Author of all glories through infinite
space and time...
But I am only a shepherd,
alone and afraid.
How can I know you, God?

In the cantata <u>The Holy Child</u>, Biblical passages are used in "Hail, O Favored One" sung by tenor soloist and chorus, and in "Blessed Are You," sung by soprano, contralto, and chorus. Next, a bass soloist, representing Joseph, sings "There Are Times."

There Are Times

There are times when a man,
a proud man, a just man,
Must confess he cannot understand
the purposes of God.
So is it now with me.
If my virgin bride had lain with any man,
I would have divorced her quietly.
But God with amazing grace has sent
an angel here to me
to impart wondrous tidings.
O God, your wisdom is inscrutable.
I bow to your will.

"Mary, Is the Road Too Rugged," in the cantata The Holy Child, is sung by a bass representing Joseph and a soprano representing Mary on the way from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The chorus sings the last lines.

Mary, Is the Road Too Rugged?

Joseph:
Mary, is the road too rugged?
We could rest here on the grass.
Mind the Roman soldiers marching;
Step aside and let them pass.

Mary:
Poor young soldiers, marching, marching.
Caesars never pity them.
Joseph, we must hurry onward
To the town of Bethlehem.

Joseph:
Lord, with anxious hearts we pray
You will guide us night and day.

Mary:
Bless us in the time of birth,
Joy of heaven, hope of earth!

Chorus:
Lord, with anxious hearts we pray
You will guide us night and day.
Bless us in the time of birth,
Joy of heaven, hope of earth!

1990

In the cantata The Holy Child, a soprano soloist sings the role of Mary, looking at the stable where the child will be born and addressing Joseph.

How Strange a Place

How strange a place to wait for him
And shelter him from rain–
A musty stable in the hills
Where friendly beasts have lain.

My lamp is filled with olive oil.
My bed is made of straw.
Go find a midwife in the town
Indifferent to my awe.

How strange a place to wait for him
And shelter him from rain–
A musty stable in the hills
Where friendly beasts have lain.

Mary and Chorus:
O praise the goodness of the Lord,
Who looked on me and smiled;
Who promised me the greatest gift:
A son, the Holy Child.

(The last four lines are repeated.)

In the cantata *The Holy Child*, *the Congregation and Chorus sing "Away in a Manger," followed by this soprano and bass duet with chorus.*

What Can I Do?

Joseph:
What can I do for the Holy Child
Born from my Mary's womb?

Mary:
Keep him as other good fathers do
And save him from Herod's doom.

Chorus:
What can we tell the Holy Child,
Pure as a rose in bloom?
Tell him our faith in our dear Lord's love
Abiding beyond the tomb.

Joseph:
What can I do for the Holy Child
Charged to a carpenter's care?

Mary:
Teach him to hammer and saw and plane
With measurements fair and square.

Chorus:
What can we tell the Holy Child,
Pure as a rose in bloom?
Tell him our faith in our dear Lord's love
Abiding beyond the tomb.

The Chorus repeats the last four lines.

1990

Midway in the cantata The Holy Child, the choir and congregation sing "Angels We Have Heard on High." Next, Herod learns from the wise men that they are journeying to find a baby king. In the following bass solo, Herod expresses his jealousy and evil intentions.

These So-Called Wise Men

Herod:
These so-called wise men seek a baby king,
A small messiah born in low estate.
If worldly wise, they ought to worship me,
The king of all Judea, Herod the Great.

For thirty years the soldiers I command
Have kept uneasy peace throughout my land.
I expeditiously will order them
To kill this star-crossed king in Bethlehem.

This child has no authority from Rome
He cannot call Jerusalem his home.
Whoever grants him royal rank at birth
Endows him with some other Realm than Earth

Male chorus repeats the third verse.

In the cantata The Holy Child, after the three Wise Men follow the star and take gifts to the infant king, they are warned in a dream not to tell Herod where to find him. In a trio of male voices, the Wise Men show their decision.

By Another Way

Trio of male voices:
By another way, my brothers,
We must journey home,
Not by way of Herod's palace,
Nor by way of Rome.

Homeward ride another way.
Praise the newborn King today!

Old King Herod knows, my brothers,
We can read the skies .
Does he not suppose, my brothers,
We can read his eyes?

Homeward ride another way.
Praise the newborn King today.

By his lying tongue, my brothers,
We are not beguiled.
Stay away from old King Herod.
Save the Holy Child.

Homeward ride another way.
Praise the newborn King today!

The third verse is repeated by the male chorus.

1990

In the cantata The Holy Child, the young shepherd whose earlier plea was "How Can I Know You, God?" now has had the experience of accompanying other shepherds to see the Christ Child. The following tenor solo with chorus expresses his feelings.

Our Messiah

Tenor:
God I could not know until I saw our Messiah.
Such a vision blesses my young eyes.
The Word made flesh, this radiant child
illuminates my life.
I have seen him with my own eyes!
Our Messiah!
I have seen him! He glorifies my soul
in a sunrise of joy!

Sopranos and Tenors:
I have seen him with my own eyes!
Our Messiah!
I have seen him! He glorifies my soul
in a sunrise of joy!

Chorus (Tutti):
I have seen him. I have seen him.
Our Messiah!

1990

In the cantata The Holy Child, Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem for the ceremony of purification. There, devout old Simeon and the old prophetess Anna recognize the Lord's Christ. "I Have Seen Him" is sung by baritone, contralto, soprano, and chorus.

I Have Seen Him

Baritone solo (Simeon):
Death I could not see until I saw our Lord's Messiah.
Such a vision blesses these old eyes, blesses these old eyes.
Mary and Joseph have brought to the temple this beautiful child.
I have seen him with my own eyes! Our Messiah!
I have seen him! He glorifies my soul in a sunrise of joy!

Contralto solo (Anna):
Joy I could not feel until I saw our Lord's Messiah.
Long years a widow, I served in the temple, fasting and praying
for one to save my people.
I have seen him with my own eyes! Our Messiah!
I have seen him! He glorifies my soul in a sunrise of joy!

Soprano and Chorus:
I have seen him with my own eyes! I have seen him!
Our Messiah!
He glorifies my soul in a sunrise of joy.
I have seen him, I have seen him, I have seen him!

Soprano (Young Girl):
Life I could not live until I saw our Lord's Messiah.
Such a vision blesses my young eyes
The Word made flesh, this radiant child illuminates my life.
I have seen him with my own eyes! I have seen him!
Our Messiah!

Young Girl with Chorus:
He glorifies my soul in a sunrise of joy!

Young Girl, Anna, Simeon, with Chorus:
He glorifies my soul, he glorifies my soul
in a sunrise of joy, of joy!

1990

In the cantata The Holy Child, the Narrator asks all who are present "to follow our own dear children to the baby Jesus." The Children's Choir sings "Point to the Brightest Star."

Point to the Brightest Star

Children's Choir (or selected treble voices):
Point to the brightest star
Shining on Christmas night.
Wonderful star of Bethlehem,
Lead us with holy light.

Come on your tiptoes,
Come where baby Jesus lies
Cradled in Mary's gentle arms,
Guarded by Joseph's eyes.

Hold out your hands to him.
Smile and he smiles at you.
Rock baby Jesus in your arms.
Tell him you love him, too.

Chorus (Treble voices join children):
Hold out your hands to him.
Smile and he smiles at you.
Rock baby Jesus in your arms.
Tell him you love him, too.

Chorus (very lightly):
Come on your tiptoes,
Come where baby Jesus lies
Cradled in Mary's gentle arms,
Guarded by Joseph's eyes.

Children's Choir:
Point to the brightest star
Shining on Christmas night.
Wonderful star of Bethlehem,
Lead us with holy light.

The cantata concludes with a Reprise of "Echo Carol," congregational singing of the familiar carol "O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright," and the organ postlude.

1990

"The Echo Carol," for chorus and organ, is a part of the cantata The Holy Child. It has also been published as a separate anthem by The Sacred Music Press, Dayton, Ohio, 1990.

Echo Carol

Do you hear?– Do you hear?–
High and clear– high and clear–
Carols ring– carols ring–
Angels sing– Angels sing–
Words of cheer– words of cheer.

Do you hear? Do you hear?
Do not fear. Do not fear.
Come revere. Come revere.
Hail the boy! Born of joy!
Christ is here– Christ is here–
Christ is here– Christ is here!

Carol high– Carol high–
Fill the sky.
Carol low– Carol low–
Love him so.

Lullaby– lullaby–
Lullaby– lullaby–
Carol high– Carol high–
Fill the sky.
Love him so– Love him so–

(Lines are repeated with shading from very soft to very loud. In the final chorus, the music builds to a climax.)

1990

Some time in 1990 I tried to do two things: to write a traditional ballad with dialogue between two persons and to express the spirit of Christmas.

Ballad of Christmas Coming

"Why do you stand on the doorstep, John?
The house is warm within."
"My dear, I'm searching for a star,
but I feel as cold as sin."

"Our guests are asking for you, John;
they fill the house with din."
"I'm listening for an angel choir
to comfort kith and kin."

"What shall I say to the children, John?
They beg to light the tree."
"Say, 'Light a thousand lights for love,
and pray for you and me.' "

"What is that sound of bells, dear John,
that ecstasy of ringing?"
" Our Lord has come to bless us all
and be our JOY in singing!"

1990

Harold Broadhead grew exquisite roses and freely shared knowledge and rooted cuttings with other rose gardeners. After his death from cancer, I wrote this memorial sonnet, which we published in the 1990 yearbook of the Huntsville-Twickenham Rose Society.

Sonnet

Roses on this Alabama hill . . .
O what could be more beautiful, my friend?
They roll in multi-colored tides and spill
The sweetest fragrance we can comprehend.
About our feet they nestle small and shy
Or stand as tall as queens for glory's sake.
They climb the arbors till they tinge the sky
And mirror with the swans upon the lake.
One thing is more beautiful, my friend,
Than roses on this Alabama hill—
The good, deep voice that taught us how to blend
This fertile soil and work with perfect will.
O such a valiant voice will guide us still
To roses on this Alabama hill!

1990

For meetings of retired teachers, I have sometimes been assigned the duty of preparing a memorial tribute. In addition to presenting facts of each teacher's life of service, I have read a poem such as this one, written about 1990.

Memorial Sonnet

On melancholy days when we are cleft
From friends who used to teach the sun to rise,
The burr of being human and bereft
Invades our minds and hearts and burns our eyes.
We honor them with tears, but more, far more,
With laughter in remembrance. By our side,
They greeted children at the schoolhouse door
And helped them learn with eagerness and pride.
These valiant teachers dared to face such foes
As Ignorance and Apathy and Fear.
How many battles did they win? Who knows?
But former students thank them year by year.
With tears and laughter, hope and love, we say,
"When God receives them, joyful be the day!"

Emma Lou Diemer composed the music for this madrigal for soprano, alto, tenor, and bass, with piano accompaniment. She used a poem by Dorothy Diemer Hendry. As Emma Lou says in her notes on performance, "'I Know a Bird' should be sung lightly and quickly and a little wistfully in keeping with the tinge of sadness in the text. The word painting of bird songs in the middle section calls for clean diction and precise rhythm." The madrigal was published in 1990 by Santa Barbara Music Publishing.

I Know a Bird

I know a bird that sings all night
Mad with love in the full moon light.
He steals his rolling roundelay
From proper birds that sing by day.
Chip, chip hoo-ee, cheer-up, cheerily, coo-coo.

How do I know he pours his song
Mad as moon light all night long?
I myself the whole night through
Hear him while I long for you.
Chip, chip hoo-ee, cheer-up, cheerily, coo-coo.

1990

This madrigal is sung by a four-part chorus a capella or with piano accompaniment. Emma Lou Diemer composed the music for a poem by Dorothy Diemer Hendry. "The Persimmon Tree" was published by Santa Barbara Music Publishing in 1990.

The Persimmon Tree

New as love, my little tree
Donned white flower-bells in spring,
Danced in green through summertime
And dangled amber fruit by fall.

"Wait till frost," friends cautioned me;
"Sweetness comes with ripening."
But I, impatient for the prime,
Tasted bitterness and gall.

1990

Emma Lou Diemer used the text below for a madrigal she composed for mixed chorus and piano. It was published in 1990 by Santa Barbara Music Publishing, Santa Barbara, California.

Show and Tell

I am such a bashful beau
I must wait for you to show
If you love me, my dear belle.
Show me, show me, show me well!

I am such a modest belle
I must wait for you to tell
If you love me, my dear beau.
Tell me, tell me, tell me so!

What is the good of shyness, dear?
Faint hearts never win, I hear.
Fan the flame of courage high!
Now together, you and I
Must show our love and tell it, too,
And keep it always, all ways true!

1991

On July 31, 1991, the Huntsville Branch of the National League of American Pen Women, meeting at the Heritage Club, honored Virginia Gilbert for her new doctorate in creative writing. Later at our request, the Alabama State Poetry Society named her as Poet of the Year. Dr. Gilbert was promoted to full professorship at Alabama A and M. It's a pleasure to boost the career of a worthy person, isn't it?

Ginny's Pen

Today, my friends, we speak of heritage,
High summer, and the evanescent Muse
Who at the moment seems to hover here
With breath of roses and triumphant news.

Her news? Though summer roses fade and die,
Their piercing sweetness comes to us again,
For she has taught our Ginny to distill
Their potency and put it in a pen.

My friends, we honor *Doctor* Gilbert here
With luminous roses Gert and Ralph have grown;
But hear *this*, Ginny dear: for every rose
We beg a luminous poem of your own.

1991

Probably all of us have had the sad experience of noting the effect of Alzheimer's Disease on a formerly brilliant friend. Although I had tinkered with this poem for years, I wrote the final version in 1991. The Poetry Workshop, Huntsville Literary Association, gave me helpful criticism.

Alzheimer's Song

Should I pretend nothing is wrong?
He doesn't sound like himself.

Not so long ago he and I were well-knit
children gifted with insouciance.

Once we hiked up Keystone Canyon
lured by blueness of harebells, babble of
waterfalls, and mystery of forest places.

We rounded a ledge and spied
a tumbledown cabin in a stand of
grandfather pines. What a find!
We clambered over mossy boulders
and moldering remains of
fallen giants to reach the door
ajar on rusty hinges.

He pointed to a cobwebbed thing
in a sagging corner. "A piano! Strange!
Why would anyone leave it here?"
Being resourceful, he wiped the dirt
from the wobbly stool with the tail of his shirt
and gestured grandly: "Music, maestro, please."
I laughed and attacked the snaggle of keys.

Eerie semblances of known arpeggios...
emptiness for notes...unearthly moaning....

Hair on end, we stopped and stared
while humor stiffened on our mouths.

Today it harrows my heart to hear him
sound like that song on a broken piano.

1992

Here's a bit of light verse, silly but true. It was one of several I wrote for a program of the Twickenham Study Club in 1992.

Automatic Teller

Scarcely glancing at my card,
He welcomes me by name,
Politely asks how much I need
And makes me glad I came.

But there are those horrendous days
When he says, "Out of order."
Me with a zillion bills to pay–
I could resort to morder.

1992

These days we speak of "flight attendants." In the exciting pioneer days of commercial aviation, we were known as "air hostesses." In 1942 I became a TWA air hostess, and a year later I became chief hostess for Mid-Continent Airlines. I left this interesting work for something even more challenging, marriage to Captain Wickliffe Hendry on Christmas Day, 1944. Fifty years later, we hosted a flight attendants' reunion at the Beville center, UAH, Huntsville. I gave copies of this reminiscence to good friends from Alabama, Minnesota, California, Florida, and other states.

Fifty Years Later

I remember you smiling in the doorway
of an old DC-3 or perhaps a Lockheed Lodestar.
You wore a blue cap tilted over your curls
and a trim uniform pinned with only one wing.
(Full wings belonged to the airline pilots
or to your brother or fiancé flying in World War II.)

Brave, warm, and winsome, you welcomed sundry passengers:
businessmen pursuing military contracts,
an anxious war-bride clasping her baby,
ferry pilots sharing comic books,
a nervous first-rider shepherding grandchildren,
wounded sailors convalesced home from the Pacific,
and a grim general bound on yet another secret mission.

In flight, you cared for their needs
from chewing gum to magazines,
from sandwiches to coffee in those beetleware cups,
from transfer information to reassurance,
from banter to sympathetic tears,
from airsickness containers in times of turbulence
to pillows for the long, droning nights.

You performed quotidian tasks
synergetic with actions of pilots and ground personnel.
It was a brave beginning—that high, clean adventure in the skies.

Since that springtide of our lives,
we have not done badly, you and I,
But we have lived apart for fifty years,
spending time and energy on separate
careers, families, towns,
withstanding separate shocks of misfortunte
and thunderbolts of grief,
discovering in our separate lives
quite different loves and worlds.

Can we recognize each other now?
Yes, yes, old friend!
I hear the same warm timbre of your voice
speaking of times that were
And see the self-same merriment in your smile
that promises tomorrow.
Let's molt from all dysphoria and cast away
all rissoms of regret
to flex our wings and fly!

1992

This poem was published in Poets Choice *in 1992. The Oldtimer mentioned in this poem is Wick.*

The Quantum Physics of Love

Dreaming of boys and boys and boys,
she hypothesizes LOVE,
and he, emerging from his own field of research,
hypothesizes HER.
They observe each other covertly and overtly,
trying to replicate their data,
for they dread error
and yearn for CERTITUDE
to love...
to be loved....

But where in their mystic dance
of mind and cosmos
can they capture Certitude?
Reeling senses give the lie of
shape and substance
to their human bodies
that are merely atoms
whirling
in a void of space and time and
scintillating
with the borrowed
light of suns.

Answer them, Oldtimer—you
who have built quarks into hadrons
and eclipsed supernovas
with your love.
Promise these so-beautiful young lovers
no certitude, no certitude,
but whisper,
"Faith.".

1992

This light-hearted poem was published in the Winter, 1992, Bulletin of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, Austin, Texas. At the time, I was influenced by the very long titles of some plays and movies.

The Delta Kappa Gamma Lecture for the Improvement of April After Too Many Rainy Days

Now listen to me, April,
For your own good;
Take off that dismal raincoat
And that dowdy hood.

Being teachers, April,
We can see through
Your silly little tantrums
To the real you.

Brush away the teardrops
And be in style
Wearing new azaleas
And a dazzling smile.

Come, April, keep your promise
And lift our spirits high:
Bedeck yourself with dogwoods
And blue, blue sky.

1993

Our friend bequeathed her body to medical research.

Sonnet XXX

Dear friends, let us remove ourselves from tears
And wear a dignity to match her own.
Let us retell the splendors we have known
In Annie Bailey Hyatt's well-lived years.
Home and school and church were her careers;
On them her talents and her spirit shone.
With honor of the South, bred in the bone,
She led to excellence her school and peers.
But we who loved her wit and warming smile,
Her hands that wrought such beauty on the keys,
And all the ways she had of sharing mirth
Are learning even more from her brave style
Of giving back to God her soul with ease
And leaving all else to her friends on earth.

1993

Wick and I feel grateful to Elderhostel and other study-tour programs for memorable adventures in the States and abroad. We seldom encountered a guide like the one characterized in this 1993 poem. He happened to be Welsh (part of my own genealogy), and I hasten to say that otherwise we loved Wales and its hospitable people.

Crwth Song

Usually we tourists warmed to local guides,
affable men and women winning us with legends
and making us feel at home...abroad.

One green day in a Welsh valley, we met
a different sort, a supercilious fellow who
herded us impatiently from relic to relic.
He gestured toward an eroded stone pillar
and declaimed, "This famous cross of Llangollen
dates all the way back to the ninth century."
He grinned sardonically. "Would you believe,
a lady from Alabama asked me, 'Is that B.C.?' "

We chuckled half-heartily with him and
shuffled our feet on the cobblestones.
To save our dignity, a soprano from the
Birmingham Opera said, "Tell us about your
international music festival, here in Llangollen."
Her tongue tripped on "Llangollen."

"Llangollen," he corrected. "Ah, yes, our *eisdettfod.*"
He swelled with pride. "Young musicians from all over
the world gather to sing and play beside the River Dee.
Dee—now there's a word even you Americans can say."
He chortled alone this time.... "Well, folks, have you
ever heard of a *crwth,* spelled *c-r-w-t-h?"*

Most of us shook our ignorant American heads,
but a Montevallo girl piped up, "Sure, it's a website—
named after an old stringed instrument, a kind of lyre."

We smiled at her while the guide blew out
his breath like a tuba player. "Well, I must admit...
that's exactly right...." He blew again....
"Come now, you musicologists from America.
If you will kindly follow me, we will go
to the abbey museum and see a genuine crwth."

I lingered outside the door, reflecting,
Most of us aren't musicologists, just
lovers of music like people everywhere.
From a boat somewhere on the River Dee
came a burst of song, sun-bright voices

1993

In the 1930's our family lived each summer in a cabin camp in Boulder Canyon while our father, George Diemer, taught courses in the summer school of the University of Colorado. My sister and I remember that our brothers were the ringleaders of the adventures and fun of dozens of campers, boys and girls, too.

Villanelle for My Brothers

I remember you with pride,
Dear twin brothers, George and John,
On the summer mountainside.

You were Joy personified.
Punning was your lexicon.
I remember you with pride.

O how you intensified
Life in our green pantheon
On the summer mountainside!

When you laughed, the cliffs replied,
Rolling laughter on and on.
I remember you with pride.

Do your jocund voices bide
In the mists of white chiffon
On the summer mountainside?

Peaks to valleys would subside
If your august puns were gone.
I remember you with pride
On the summer mountainside.

1993

Whenever I give a whirlpool begonia rhizome to a green-thumbed friend, a wonderful thing happens. This poem was published in Poets' Choice, 1993.

Something for You

Just look at this twisted rhizome
staked in an old clay pot.
Have you ever seen a more pitiful thing?
Accept it please.
You have only to tamp the soil around it
with your beneficent fingers.
Watered and warmed in your east window,
it will grow beautiful
like everything else
akin to you.

In dead of winter
it will spring to life
in a glad effluence of glossy leaves
dark green on top and magenta underneath
like a dancer flashing her petticoats.
Early in January it will loft stems
tipped by panicles of pink flowers
delicate as newborn kittens' paws
coaxed by your Ceres touch,
your Maytime smile.

1993

In 1993 the Huntsville-Madison County Botanical Garden Society sponsored a poetry contest. My friend Wilma Powers won first place, I won second, my friend Lola Northington won third, and my friends Reese Danley-Kilgo and Julia Sculthorpe won honorable mention. These poems were published in Garden Columns. My poem, "To the Garden Volunteers," praises the volunteers who founded the garden and all of the hundreds of volunteers since then. Wick and I are members of The Huntsville-Twickenham Rose Society, which planted and cared for the Rose Garden. Some of us are too elderly and ill to continue this volunteer work, but we hail the younger people who are a new generation of volunteers. The black swans mentioned in my poem were a notable feature of the garden until they were stolen, apparently by a coyote.

To the Garden Volunteers

Where stately columns stand for heritage
And hold our civic banner high,
You garden for the new millennium
Compatriots of Earth and sky.

Good friends, you dreamed the quintessential dream
Of dogwood trails and trillium bowers.
You chopped out briers to save these redbud trees
And found the ferns and fire-pink flowers.

By excavating rock and clay, you struck
A spring that brimmed this calm blue lake
Whereon black swans in largo tempo glide
With snow-white cygnets in their wake.

New maples honor Constitution Walk,
Sweet roses rapture bride and gloom,
And herbs and flowers of the season play
Empyreal symphonies of bloom.

May children learn from you to care for Earth–
Most beautiful of biospheres–
And even bring the bluebirds home again!
God bless and keep you, volunteers!

1993

I wrote this hymn text in 1993, and my sister Emma Lou Diemer set it to music for choir, congregation, and organ. The hymn is being published in 2003 by Zimbel Press, Webster, New York.

Waters of Life

Waters of life in Thy river flow
Eternally pure and deep.
We who drink of Thy river know
Never again to weep.
We who bathe in Thy river show
Ever more joy to keep.

Trees of life by Thy river grow
Immortally green and tall.
We who gather Thy harvest owe
Love to the great and small.
We who give of Thy balm bestow
Peace and goodwill to all.

1994

I wrote this verse to accompany an arrangement of sweet-smelling, lavender-colored Sachet miniature roses in the Huntsville-Twickenham Rose Show. The arrangement won a blue ribbon. Flowers can be poems, can't they?

Scented Blessing

O Mother Earth, with gentle power,
bring a cooling summer shower,
and let us breathe along the way
the fragrance of your own Sachet.

Although we marvel at modern technology and try to learn it as fast as we can, we know it will never equal the complexities of human personality. Here's a verse written in December, 1994.

A Christmas Greeting

You are radiant energy
subdivided into finite quanta
and organized
as interfacing systems
to initialize the
endearing entity
that I call *You.*

On this eve of Christmas
when we praise the Source
of that other Transmutation,
I sing some of my joyful carols
from the uttermost depths of
my integrated being
in thankfulness
for *You.*

1995

This poem about an experience familiar to many of us was written in 1995.

Matters of Life and Death

Too often a bird mistook the clear glass
of our patio door for open air and flew into it.
Whump! That sickening sound!
On the red brick paving we would find the poor bundle of
feathers: eyes shut, neck twisted, wings askew.
While we hovered anxiously, the bird might open
its eyes and slowly recollect itself.
What joy if it flew away!

Otherwise we had to dig a hole in the rose garden
and give the fallen flyer a Christian burial.
We felt most regretful over the grave of
a goldfinch or a mockingbird since
God presumably had his eye on the sparrow.

To minimize the avian mayhem
(and to keep ourselves more comfortable)
we installed thermopane doors overlaid with
wooden dividers. Surely no bird would mistake
the small, glassy interstices for open air.

Nevertheless, on a May morning while I was
drinking my coffee without a care or a suspicion,
I heard that distressing sound. Whump!
There on the red brick lay a bundle of feathers,
more intensely blue than any other bird,
the blue of an indigo bunting. I suppose the
bright fellow had been accustomed to flitting through
the smallest of spaces between the leaves of the gingko tree,
but now he lay stunned in deathlike stillness.

Kneeling beside him, I kept vigil and found myself praying,
half in hope, half in despair, to the God of all creatures.
"Please, please, let him live!"

He opened his eyes and stared in a daze until
I touched his feathery warm body. Startled, he
rose on his spindly legs and hopped away from me.
He stood and waited, gathering strength,
testing the wind perhaps. Then straight and true
on his blue wings he flew up into the gingko tree.

1995

"Hey, Boys! Hi, Girls!" is one of several madrigals for four-part chorus and piano with text by Dorothy Diemer Hendry and music by Emma Lou Diemer. It was premiered by the Belvidere High School Madrigal Singers, directed by Linda Kohl, in Belvidere, New Jersey, and published by Santa Barbara Music Publishing in 1995.

Hey, Boys! Hi, Girls!

Hey, boys! Hi, boys! Listen to me well!
That girl has thorns like roses, roses.
She weaves a love spell too beautiful to tell
And breaks one's heart with her poses, poses.
Ding dong! Ding dong! Ring a warning bell!

Hey, girls! Hi, girls! Listen to me well!
That boy is flighty as breezes, breezes.
He hums a love song too dulcet to be long
And breaks one's heart as he pleases, pleases.
Ding dong! Ding dong! Ring a warning bell!

Hey, boys! Hi, girls! Listen to me well.
That girl with thorns like roses, roses,
Is weaving a spell as she poses, poses,
For the flighty boy like breezes, breezes,
Humming her a song that pleases, pleases.
Ding dong! Ding dong! Ring a happy bell!

1995

Like other visitors to Brazil, we visited the shanty towns known as favellas. The appealing children there gave us more than we could give them. This tribute to the children was published in Poets' Choice, 1995.

CHILDREN OF BAHIA

When the children offer ribbons from the Lord of Bonfim,*
we give them a few cruzados and lifesavers
...yet how beautiful they are with their
welcoming smiles and samba-dancing feet!

Being world travelers, we don't fall for their tricks
...yet is it a trick to be so thin, so ragged?

Charity begins at home with the poor people of the USA
...yet how well are we feeding *them*?

These ever-growing multitudes of children deplete natural resources
...yet we consume one hundred times more than any child.

Here in the favellas they are only practicing their singing and dancing
...yet we serve the gods of labor and lucre.

Yes, the children are frittering their lives away on Carnival.
Then why have we journeyed so far to see them?

They are so beautiful with their
welcoming smiles and samba-dancing feet!

***Bonfim** [Portuguese]: good end, kindly purpose*

1996

In an environmental conference in Perth, Australia, Wick and I heard the eminent Canadian scientist Dr. David Suzuki speaking on the web of life. He said that people are made of atoms that have been used over and over again. He made the startling statement that you and I are composed of atoms from all the creatures and plants that have ever lived. Imagine! This poem appeared in Poets' Choice, Huntsville Literary Association, 1996.

LEFTOVERS

If I were a scientist, I would have to say
dispassionately,
"You are composed of
leftovers—
yes, merely leftovers—particles of matter used and reused
in ancient gingkos, dinosaurs, and seahorses,
in shifting deserts, glaciers, and coral reefs,
in tumbledown shanties, log cabins, and marble palaces,
and in all people who died long ago including
Sappho, Michelangelo, Brahms, and Dolley Madison."

But I am not a scientist, and therefore I will declare
passionately,
You are composing these particles
with such integrity
such fidelity to God,
that I am thrilled with
the grace of living things and the grandeur of Earth
the warmth of our dwelling
and the homeliness of
Sappho, Michelangelo, Brahms, and Dolley Madison.

1997

When Wick and I toured Australia and New Zealand, we marveled at the diverse life forms. Although often filled with awe and reverence for nature, I felt most strongly moved by the flight of the magnificent Royal Albatrosses circling the cliffs of Taiaroa Head on the south island of New Zealand. This cycle of poems tells (1) facts we learned about the Royal Albatross, (2) my homage to the spirit of this royal bird who predated man by millions of years, and (3) the true story of how a Dunedin school teacher saved the nestlings from extinction. The cycle was published in Poets' Choice in 1997.

Royal Albatross

I. The Sighting

Off we go, a boatload of Americans, venturing late in the day toward the wild headland
of the Otago Peninsula, where man has most assuredly gone before—yes, and woman, too.

Our mission is to seek and find the proverbial birds that yielded
hollow bones to blow as a Maori nose flute, warm flesh to feed a sailor starved at sea,
a hooked beak to hold a captain's charts, webbed feet to form a smoker's pouch,
breast feathers to warm a woman's muff,
and a holy spirit to haunt the ancient mariner's rime.

Is it too late to say we are coming not to plunder but to pay homage?
We line the starboard rail and focus binoculars on the sky above the cliffs.
"Look higher! Higher! There! Can you see? O beautiful!"
Around and around the jutting rocks of Taiaroa Head,
mystical birds glide and soar without a wing beat in the silver sky.

II. Apostrophe

Your Majesty, we are honored to meet you. When our own ancestors scrabbled
with clever fingers for mollusks in the warm river marshes,
Your royal family had already flown for millions of years
over the vast blue tides and ice floes of the Southern Ocean.

On monarchial wings, eleven feet from tip to tip, you ride the icy gales that blow eternally around
Antarctica.
Rarely you alight on the sea to rest and feed for a night or two, maneuvering with webbed feet
to seize in your strong beak the octopus carrion or bioluminescent squid.
To rise again, you run on the ocean swell with those wide feet until your outstretched wings
catch the updraft and lift you, and you veer into the wind and climb and climb and climb.
For days or months you stay aloft, soaring and gliding on tireless wings, tips delicately
tempered to every nuance of the wind.

To us you seem the lonely essence of integrity in your circumnavigation of the Pole.
We named you (or God named you) the Royal Albatross.

III. A Ballad to Tell a True Story

Near the bonny town of Dunedin
On cliffs confronting the sea
Proud albatrosses nested
Like visiting royalty.

But all of the chicks fell victim
To poacher or dog or rat
Till Lance, a forthright teacher,
Said, "Quite enough of that!"

He camped beside new nestlings
And guarded them night and day,
And the whole bonny town of Dunedin
Rejoiced when they flew away.

Returning again to Dunedin
After three or four years at sea,
Young albatrosses nested
Like homecoming royalty.

Lance and his kindred keepers
Who band the birds have told
Of a mother bird aged sixty
Who acts neither tired nor old.

Bending down over a nestling
To band a webbed foot there,
A keeper will feel the mother
Preening his human hair.

Let us all go down to Dunedin,
That bonny town by the sea,
And view at a reverent distance
Their homecoming royalty.

1997

Using this text, my sister, Emma Lou Diemer, composed an anthem for unison voices, keyboard, and optional flute. The Pilgrim Press in Cleveland, Ohio, published it in 1997.

Who Gave Us the World?

Who gave us the world
as a garden to grow
with rich earth, warm sunshine, and rain?
Who gave us good seeds
by the millions to sow
in the valley and over the plain?

Chorus:
God gave us the world as a garden
and told us to keep it with love
for trees to bloom and birds to carol!
Praise God for the rainbow above!

We garden in vain
if we garden alone
forgetful of creatures that share
the freshness of rain
and the God-given air
and the world that is everyone's home.

Chorus:
God gave us the world as a garden
and told us to keep it with love
for trees to bloom and birds to carol!
Praise God for the rainbow above!

1997

This playful verse was written in honor of Dot and Fletch Spencer, elderly friends who had married recently. They were both good athletes. Dot, in fact, had won the Senior Women's Golf Olympics, and Fletch was a shuffleboard champion. We attended a party for them that their eldest daughter and her husband hosted in their home and garden in Chattanooga, Tennessee, June 1, 1997.

Celebration

Hail to the Champions, valiant and free,
Respectively four-score and four-score-and-three!
With balloons and confetti and laughter and song,
We celebrate lives that are fruitful and strong.

Dear Dot and dear Fletch, on this Tennessee lawn,
We welcome you home from Bear Down in Tucson
And hail you as heroes in this celebration—
The pride of the state and the hope of the nation.

Though glad of your shuffleboard prowess and skill,
Olympian golf, and competitive will,
We hasten to say this is not about gold
Of medals awarded or honors extolled.

It is about being the Queen of Our Hearts
And being the King of Felicitous Arts.
You shine with the luminous gold of endeavor!
We hail you, admire you, and love you forever!

1997

Connie Strauss was a real person who suffered uncomplainingly from muscular dystrophy for thirty years. My ballad tells some of the ways she helped people and animals. We presented Connie with a framed copy of this tribute at a neighborhood birthday party in her honor.

The Legend of Sunset Cove

We neighbors remember a fighting cock
Too bloody and tattered to crow
Who staggered down here from Green Mountain
Divining just where he should go.

He tottered right over to Monteview
And tumbled himself at the feet
Of one of the kindliest neighbors
We ever could hope to meet.

She patched and pampered and fed him
Until he was better than new.
With two or three hens for a harem,
He happily sang "Cock-a-doo!"

Our children would flock to her doorstep
With suffering puppies and birds.
She gave them her skill and her knowledge
And blessed them with comforting words.

She lovingly speaks of her husband,
Her son, and his family, too.
She rises above her own illness
To ask us whatever we do.

When windows are gilded in glory
And shadows are turning to mauve,
We thank the Good Lord for our Connie—
The Legend of Sunset Cove!

1998

Like most of my poems, this one tells a true experience. It was printed in Poets' Choice, 1998.

Nothing Is Wasted

How can David say it?
He must be damming a flood of tears
for a wife
...more lyrical in her living than clouds at sunrise,
...more attuned to him than a meadowlark to a meadow.
I try to read his impassive face
as he stands beside her casket and says again,
"Nothing is wasted."

Driving home alone I cry,
delving below my own grief to plumb his.
Their empty house, every room bereft of her presence
an echoing void—
does David suppose he can fill it with forty years of memories?
Were their days and nights together so complete that now he has
nothing to regret...
nothing to lament...
nothing to call *wasted*?

In the night I wake from troubled dreams and touch my fingers
to my husband's face—*so warm and safe!*
He stirs and murmurs, "Yes, I'm here."
How well he understands my need for reassurance! All my vigils
by our children's beds could not save the baby boy we lost.
It would stab my heart to say, "Nothing is wasted."

Still, I think of David with his quiet eyes:
the man of science, probing beyond stars;
the man of religion, probing deeper distances within.
If he so certainly enfolds himself in silken clouds
to hear his lilting meadowlark at dawn,
might I not hope to heal my heart
by saying, "Nothing is wasted"?

1998

Roses as well as other plants suffer from extremely heavy rainfall, which sometimes results from a weather phenomenon named El Niño. The cause of El Niño is an unusual flow of warm water along the western coast of South America. Besides killing kinds of fish that cannot live in such warm water, El Niño affects weather in the United States and other countries. It occurs at Christmastime and therefore is named for the Christ child– "El Niño," Spanish for "the boy child." An unusual flow of cold water that results in unseasonable weather and drought is called "La Niña," Spanish for "the girl child." The following poem was published in 1998 in the Huntsville-Twickenham Rose Show Schedule.

The Gathering

El Niño, La Niña—
these foul weather breeders
that mask under innocent names
are not the only foes of rose growers.
We struggle with noxious diseases, insect pests,
and the limitations of our bodies.

We commiserate with fellow rosarians,
making esoteric jokes of our difficulties
and sharing whatever we can muster in the way
of new science and art and plain hard work.

Being nothing if not stubborn, we triumph
in the gathering of multitudes of roses,
for we garden to lavish on friends and lovers
these medleys of luminous colors and primal fragrances
that glorify and gladden the ceremonies of living.

Rosarians, are we not fighters and poets at heart?
Are we not defending the sanctity of the floral emblem
of our city and nation—and someday, God willing, the world?

Blessed are those with a dream of roses
blossoming in the garden at home—or somewhere—
with the innocence and beauty of
the *true* children of Earth and Heaven—
the Christmas Boy and all dear babies—
Los Niños, Las Niñas!

1998

This poem was written for our friends Richard and Bianca Cox in November, 1998. Both are excellent musicians, who originated the popular Concerts in the Park and other musical programs for North Alabama. Bianca is not only a clarinetist and conductor but also a writer, teacher, painter, and needlewoman. (What talented friends we have!) Our Huntsville Branch of the National League of American Pen Women honored Richard and Bianca on the occasion of their Fiftieth Anniversary.

Golden Wedding

Step lightly to the music of this day
For in your honor Autumn came to stay
With swirl of golden leaves and balmy shower
Of rain as fresh and lovely as a wedding bower.

Let music of your lives go on and on
Past fifty years to many a golden dawn
To charm the ears of every listening friend
And children's children's children without end.

We glory in your friendship day by day
And cherish all you paint and write and say.
Bianca dear and Richard, brave and true,
May Heaven bless the golden likes of you!

1999

This poem was published in Ordinary and Sacred as Blood: Alabama Women Speak, River's Edge Publishing Company, 1999. It was set to music for voice and organ by Emma Lou Diemer.

The Dogwood Tree

While mourning you, I saw a dogwood tree
Beset by lashing wind and freezing rain.
Poor little tree, I thought. It is like me,
Not strong enough to stand this mortal pain.

But when the storm had passed, the dogwood tree
Still stood, encased in ice, yet holding up
Each branch, each twig, each cryophilic cup
As though in homage to some Majesty.

And now on April mornings clean and blue,
The tree has opened every chalice wide
And lifts a thousand flowers white and new
Like glad hosannas for the Eastertide.

"Dear one," I say, "The tree is strong like you,
Transcending death as only Love can do."

1999

In the past forty years we have grown all kinds of roses in our garden–hybrid teas, floribundas, miniatures, climbers, modern shrubs, hybrid perpetuals, species roses, and old garden roses. The requisites are that they look beautiful and bring joy. It's a bonus if they're fragrant, too. We take pleasure in giving them to family and friends and other people who like the Queen of Flowers. Here's a rose puzzle poem I wrote in 1999.

To My Valentine
With 25 Varieties of Roses
(Count them.)

My Honey, My Choice, My Sunshine,
My Happy Chick-a-dee,
I Love you like an Earthquake.
Gee Whiz! Why Not? Si!

Call me your Special Angel
or Sweetie Pie or Pearl.
For You I'll be Outrageous,
a Knockout Funny Girl.

I'm Nearly Wild with Giggles.
No Maiden's Blush you see.
O Kiss Me Quick, you Iceberg—
Sheer Bliss for You 'n' Me!

1999

In January, 1999, Larry West invited Wick and me to a surprise birthday party for his wife Debbie. We gave Debbie this verse in her honor and enjoyed the festivities.

To Debbie West

You are the TEACHER
who has surprised boys and girls
by unlocking their minds
and educing the ART
they didn't even know they had.

You are the POET
who has surprised a dull morning
by shining your light into a dewdrop
and showing the COLORS
hidden there.

You are the FRIEND
who has surprised each one of us
with a JOY we never would
have felt except for you.

Tonight you are the ONE
surprised (we hope)
by your dear husband LARRY
and by your friends who wish you
with no more secrecy...

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

WARM WISHES!

JOYFUL BLESSINGS!

1999

The husband and children of my life-long friend Dorothea Ozar Jagoda planned a surprise party for her eightieth birthday in June, 1999. Not being able to travel at that time from Huntsville, Alabama, to Shawnee Mission, Kansas, I sent this sonnet in her honor. It mentions nicknames we gave each other in college and alludes to the meaning of the Greek names Dorothy and Dorothea—"gift of God."

To Dorothea

Remember when we nicknamed everyone–
As Ozie, Diemie, Lanie, and the rest?
And later chose amoebic names for fun–
Whatever sounded silliest and best?
O we were happy girls and eager, too,
For life and love and marvelous careers!
Let us rejoice, dear Dorothea, you
Have bloomed in radiance across the years!
Your given name sounds something like my own
But adds a syllable of classic grace
Authentic for *your* character alone
And for the timeless beauty of your face.
Your parents named you well, for all can say,
"You are a Godly gift to bless this day!"

1999

This poem, written in 1999, is a tribute to an interesting friend.

Thelma's Hats

Is it better to laugh at clowns
with flapping shoes and silly hats
or cry for something bravely sad
behind their painted grins?

We never saw Thelma without a hat
although we fellow poets weren't
much on pomp and may have bought
our clothes at rummage sales.

Still, she wore each hat with such a flair
it could have been designed by some great
couturier who loved her madly and almost
exclusively in his own French fashion.

Being a Mensan, she liked to deadpan and
fly jokes like clay pigeons over our heads
to see if we were quick enough to
shoot them on the wing and laugh.

If we could believe her stand-up comedies,
Thelma had been adored and jilted by
a score of feckless lovers and husbands
and humored by daughters as steadfast as stars.

Her poems ridiculed her follies. Who else
would give a sobbing granddaughter
a crystal butter-dish as an inviolable casket
for a bird with sky-blue wings?

We stood a bit apart from Thelma because
we deemed our lives more orderly than hers;
yet, toward the last, we saw another reason
for her rueful humor and those hats.

I like to think we closed the distance
with our own clown-like smiles and hugs;
and sharing her tragi-comic view of caskets,
we shed our tears on opening night.

1999

In 1999 Ed Elliott retired after fourteen productive years as president of Central Missouri State University, Warrensburg. Because he and his beautiful wife Sandra were remarkably effective leaders and delightful friends, they were honored in many ways by faculty, students, graduates, and community leaders. For the opening of the Sandra Elliott ballroom, I sent them the dancing measures of a villanelle.

Villanelle for President Ed Elliott

You won us with the brightness of your face
And words of wisdom fourteen years ago
To bring home Sandra with her smiling grace.

Because you learned great legends of this place,
You boldly planned for services to grow.
You won us with the brightness of your face.

Your building program flourishes apace
While over Selmo Park the banners blow
To bring home Sandra with her smiling grace.

New students by the thousands came to race
Technology and let their spirits glow.
You won us with the brightness of your face.

Alumni travel far in time and space
To work with zest and share the joy you show
To bring home Sandra with her smiling grace.

You leave your honored presidential dais
To be a colleague we are proud to know.
You won us with the brightness of your face
To bring home Sandra with her smiling grace.

1999

Our grandchildren remind us of our own youthful hopes and dreams although we realize the new generation will surpass us in many ways. This poem, published in Poets' Choice, *Huntsville Literary Association. 1999, is addressed to Deanna Augsburger, who was studying abroad on an art scholarship from Vanderbilt. Surprisingly, she is now a chemical engineer, but she still has an abiding love for art, music, literature, nature, and people.*

To My Granddaughter

With my first prize money I bought a modern Remington noiseless
typewriter to civilize my scribbling and the wild language of my heart
with acceptable letters marching primly across the page

although apparently something was *lost* in the translation.

Sixty-five years later I am still trying to be modern, a certified
technological Marvel of the Millennium, tapping the keyboard
of my state-of-the-art computer, but I can't help noticing you

are cool and casual with yours and can take it or leave it to go

swinging on your flute with folk singers in a pub in Dublin,
or photographing bridges, cathedrals, and cobblestones in Prague,
or sketching a street-boy huddled forlornly in a doorway in Amsterdam.

I dip the tattered banner of my punditry to the ground in homage.

You are the consummate artist I will never be,
finding whatever is timeless in all timely things and giving back
the verity from your brave and compassionate heart...

Wherefore at last, my dear, something is *found* in the translation.

In November, 1999, the Huntsville Branch of the National League of American Pen Women hosted the Alabama State Association Conference at the Holiday Inn, Madison Square, Huntsville. Thanks to the fine work of the Conference Committee and excellent participation by members of other branches, we had a very successful conference. I prepared the illustrated program booklet with the help of my computer and printer. The following poem, printed in the booklet, is titled with the conference theme: "Windows on the Past, Doors to the Future."

Windows on the Past, Doors to the Future

One casement opens to fresh wind from the sea
and sunlight on the upland where
remembered children play,
running and tumbling, laughing and singing–
innocent as lilies of the field.

Another opens on the dragging stench of slums or
lonely keening from an ancient battleground–
miseries we must expose as long as
we have wits to arm and pens to wield
in womanly compassion.

Various windows open, thousands more,
for us to chronicle with truthful art. At last
we turn away and quote, "What's past is prologue."
Are we ready now? Unlock the doors to destiny
and prayerfully step forth.

1999

I enjoyed writing this lighthearted poem in Ozark dialect. It won a first place in the fall contest of the Alabama State Poetry Society in 1999. Emma Lou Diemer, my sister, set it to music for soprano and piano. It was published by the Southern Music Company in Volume 14 of Art Songs by American Women.

The Caller

Hey thar! I heared ye
shufflin' yore cold feet on me welcome mat.
Don't be so bashful, ol' timer,
a-coughin' and ahemmin'on the stoop.
Jes' raise the knocker with yore bony fingers...
knock...knock...knock!
Yep, I've been a-waitin' for ye quite a spell.

Once upon a time
when I war young an' good-lookin',
you come a-courtin'.
I flirted with ye and led ye a merry chase.
Then I yanked yore scruffy beard and haw-hawed
an' sent ye packin'.

Now I ain't so choosy.
Gimme the crook of yore arm, dearie,
an' we kin hobble out togither
laughin' fit to kill.

Hey thar! Let's kick up our heels!
The joke's on the both of us!
You ain't much of a prize, but
neither am I, Mistah Death!

2000

This poem, about an actual experience of mine, won a first place award in the spring 2000 contest of the Alabama State Poetry Society and was published in Poets' Choice in 2001.

Triple Bypass

Sirens rend the grogginess of a Sunday afternoon.
Where are they stopping this time?
A mask gives gasping breath, a stretcher
jolts, a needle sews my forearm.
Shrouded in surreal fog, I glimpse
uniforms in motion...
anxious faces of husband and son—
our son the hero who called 911.

Stabilized and lucid on a hospital bed,
I listen with my dear family
to options offered by collected surgeons:
there is nothing to lose but life
and likewise nothing else to gain.

Strangely I *hear* the surgery:
scraping of veins commandeered from
my leg, incised from ankle to crotch,
terse timbre of professional voices,
pulsing of new blood-ways for
a strong old heart.

Cheerful nurses take away
one by one
the wires and tubes that fetter me
and set me free!
Henceforward every leaf
glistens with glory,
every familiar face radiates
Joy to the core of my being,
and Mercy reigns amid the blazing stars.

2000

This poem accompanied a gift at a bridal shower. It won a second place award in the spring 2000 contest of the Alabama State Poetry Society.

Sonnet for My Friend's Daughter

As one long used to cooking by the book
Or by the label on a can of peas,
I cannot give you gourmet recipes;
But I can tell you, Susan, where to look
To find the most splendiferous kind of cook—
The reigning Queen of Kitchens, if you please,
From Monte Sano to the Pyrenees.
Collect her recipes by hook or crook!
On second thought, I'd better not advise
So fair and radiant a bride to steal.
No, rather you must beg: "O Mother, rise
To this occasion! Mother, please reveal
The way you mix the savor in what's said
And add the yeast of love to daily bread."

The children of my niece Rene requested a poem for a surprise party they were planning for her fiftieth birthday, September 2, 2000. All five of the Krey children helped with the reading.

Surprise
On the Fiftieth Birthday of Susan Rene Diemer Krey

Dear niece Rene, are you surprised?
Fair enough! *You* have surprised *us*
ever since your baby hands conducted
melodic colors of the morning.
It's time to calm your sunrise self and
listen while we play your valorous song.

You learned imperishable motifs
that sounded and resounded in
thousands of your ancestors
down through your grandparents,
the Wengers and Diemers—
luminous talents and powerful love
voiced and heightened by your
parents, Lois and John.

We laugh remembering the
counterpoint of your girlhood with
your whimsical brothers George and Jack
and Dee-light-full sister DeeDee,
playing at family gatherings on
the rosy summit of merriment
with your redoubtable cousins
Betty, Terri, Alan, and Bonny.

We (your Aunt Emmy and
your Uncle Wick and I) wanted to
prolong the harmony of your young life;
but your valiant Dad departed all too soon,
followed in later years (but still too early)
by your devoted and resourceful Mom.
How fine they were, and Papa Charlie, too!
We are thankful, dear Rene, that you
have drowned each dissonance of grief
in mighty cadences of courage
and chords of living faith.

We hail with joy and sweet wild roses the
major theme of your romance with Philip Krey,
a man for springtime and all other seasons:
playfellow, husband, father,
scholar, seminary president, world citizen,
and guardian of the faith.

Just as clearly, we see you, Rene,
a woman for the golden light of autumn
and the cello music of all seasons:
blithe companion, wife, mother,
teacher, music maker, seminary angel,
and friend to the world.

On this surprising day you stand
betwixt two millennia and
midway in the century of your life,
surrounded by friends and kinsmen,
your loving husband, and your
bright and beautiful children—
Jessicah, Lindsay, Jordan, Noah, and Micah.

What a day for celebration!
A day to play the music of a life!
A day to lift our voices in a psalm
of glad thanksgiving!
A day to pray to God for strength and hope!

With words and music on this happy day,
We love and cherish you, our dear Rene.

It's fun to read and write limericks. The ones below have been presented at various club meetings. "No One We Know" received a second place award in the spring 2000 contest of the Alabama State Poetry Society.

Homing Pigeons

A gossip named Trivia Troost
Gave neighborhood stories a boost
With whispers and sighs
And colorful lies
That flew in a circle to roost.

Selling Brooklyn Bridge

"I'm slick as a whistle," said Hale.
"I fleeced that poor goon at the sale
I poured on the honey
And ran with his money.
So what am I doing in jail?"

Road Rage

A fearful mutation befell
A darling young driver named Nell.
While caught in a jam
As tight as a clam,
She swore like a demon from Hell.

Proposal

"I love you," said Romeo Roggin.
"I love every hair on your noggin.
If you will agree
To pay me a fee,
I might let you ride my toboggan."

The Beatles and a Beetle

Remember sweet songs of their prime–
That innocent, halcyon time?
But here's quite another
We capture and smother–
It threatens our roses sublime.

At the Derby

An heiress flew down to Kentucky
Remarking, "I've always been lucky."
She bet all she had
And then said, "Egad!
I guess it's my turn to feel yucky."

From the Show-Me State

Our favorite coloratura,
Who learned how to sing in Missouri,
Lifts off at the Met
In a soaring duet
Eclipsing the tenor's bravura.

No One We Know

A wanna-be poet named Bray
Began a Nobel epopee.
He scribbled each night
Till his tresses turned white
But found he had nothing to say.

Fairy Tale

"The bed must be softer," said she,
"For a genuine princess like me.
Use layers of fluff,
The downiest stuff.
Get rid of that troublesome pea."

Box of Chocolates

Our future together depends
On whether you notice the trends.
If you steal the cherry
And leave me the berry,
We cannot continue as friends.

Conversation

Though stylishly senior and gray,
We never lack something to say.
A topic remains
With endless refrains:
"O where are we aching today?"

2000

The American Composers Forum initiated the Continental Harmony Project, with funding by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Rockefeller Foundation, as a musical celebration of the Millennium in all fifty states. Alabama is represented by I Am a Song, a song cycle for soprano and orchestra with words by eight Alabama poets and music composed by Philip Koplow. The Etowah Youth Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Michael Gagliardo, presented the World Premiere Concert Performance November 12, 2000, in Gadsden, Alabama. The lyric below is by Dorothy Diemer Hendry of Huntsville, Alabama. The complete work is on file in the Library of Congress.

The Song of the Land

I am a song
older than the name
of Etowah or Alabama
or America.
I am older than the name
of any place you claim.
I am a song—
the Song of the Land.

I am a song
that waited long
in the fiery womb of Earth.
Rains fell, oceans filled,
and God brought forth
the land in primal glory
with a song for many voices.
I am the Song of the Land.

Birds trill my flutes at sunrise,
Wind strums my harp in the trees,
Thunder rolls my drum in the mountains,
Rivers troll my chorus to the seas.

People young and old,
I need you!
Listen to the song
in Etowah...Alabama...America—
wherever you belong.
Dear people, take a stand
to keep me clean and strong!
Sing me—the Song of the Land!

Birds trill my flutes at sunrise,
Wind strums my harp in the trees,
Thunder rolls my drum in the mountains,
Rivers troll my chorus to the seas.

2001

This poem about a true experience won a third place award in the Alabama State Poetry Society contest in the spring of 2001.

Aplomb

Thrusting his long curved beak into the mulch,
a brown thrasher takes his choice of appetizers in
the bed of azaleas beyond my windowpane. At such
close range I can study his sleek head and brilliant eyes.
He's a suave and charming fellow with a long-tailed
coat of red brown and a speckled vest.

If he knows I am admiring him from just four feet away,
he doesn't care a whit. To him I am a dim image of otherness.
He hops, flicks pine straw, and pursues his happiness.

But I, too, have a calm way of capturing joy.
When he courts his mate to nest again in the dogwoods,
I will open my window and eavesdrop on his April song.

2001

While we admire the impossibly beautiful lady posing on a cameo or in some other work of art, we prefer a real woman. This brief poem, written in 2001, is in the form called "Cameo" with syllable count of 2, 5 , 8, 3, 8, 7, 2.

To Grandmother's Cameo

Classic
profile, carved in cold
chalcedony and set in a
frame of gold,
I miss the wrinkled softness of
another face, love-light in
her eyes.

Like many of our friends, Wick and I belong to the Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform: We believe that Alabama is hampered by its present constitution, adopted in 1901 and repeatedly amended. Unfortunately certain power groups within the state have opposed all efforts to replace this ancient, inefficient monstrosity with a modern, streamlined, effective constitution. Supporters of reform welcomed "Mama's New Gown" when it appeared as a letter to the editor in The Huntsville Times. Since they have often referred to my letter as a "poem," I decided to see how it would look in free verse form. What do you think? Let's hope it does some good!

Mama's New Gown

Alabama is like a beautiful woman with nothing to wear but
a bulky gown constituted of patches and tatters.
When she tries to move forward, the patches
weigh her down and the tatters tangle her feet.
Her sister states laugh whenever she stumbles.
"Poor thing! Why does she wear that raggedy old dress?
She's her own worst enemy."

Fortunately Alabama has many children who love her.
Some of them say, "We like Mama in her old dress.
Some of the patches are sacred."

Other children say, "Mama deserves something better.
Let's go to Montgomery and design it."

The end of the story could be that beautiful Alabama
would step forth in a svelte new gown.
Undoubtedly the gown would have spiritual motifs
woven into its durable fabric, but it would also have
ergonomic lines, enabling Alabama to move freely
and to work harmoniously with any or all of her children.
Alabama's sister states would exclaim, "Look at Alabama
in her bright new gown! Whoever though
she could be so stunning?"

All of us who are Alabama's children would smile
and declare proudly, "That's our mama! We're
moving with her to the front of the line!"

2001

This narrative poem in blank verse won a first place award in the Alabama State Poetry contest in the spring of 2001.

The Soliloquy of the Father of Mexico

While gazing at the murals painted by Orozco in Guadalajara, we hear the voice of the Mexican national hero, Padre Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (1753-1811)

I. The First Mural

Orozco brings the painted man to life.
He lunges from the carnage on the wall
and holds us with his eyes, his suffering eyes.

I am Hidalgo, onetime parish priest
in old Dolores, town of many sorrows.
Who were my people then? The cruel nobles
with my Spanish blood? The distant prelates
of the Holy Church? Or native people
of the parish, learning faith from me?
I served Our Virgin and the humble folk—
my people of the soil of Mexico.

The Royalists soon found me troublesome,
a danger to the proud imperial state.
They said I undermined authority
by teaching peasants better ways to farm,
discoursing on the dignity of man,
and sharing dreams of the Enlightenment.
They said the slaves no longer *thought* as slaves,
and I, an errant priest, had shaken thrones!

One black September night I knelt in prayer
before Our Virgin's candle in the church.
I prayed, "If soldiers come, how can I save
my people from the doom awaiting me?"
Lo, to my wonderment, the candle flared
as though to be a torch of God's own wrath.
I climbed aloft and rang the steeple bells
till all my people gathered in alarm.
With stronger voice than ever had been mine,
I sang a battle song, a call to arms,
and heard my people shout it back again:
"Viva, viva, Virgin of Guadalupe!
Down with the God-damned tyranny of kings!

II. The Second Mural

He brandishes the torch of God's own wrath
and holds us with his eyes, his burning eyes.

I am Hidalgo, priest turned general,
whose ragged band of freedom fighters grew
by tens of thousands with a rallying cry
for Mexico—"El Grito de Dolores!"

I led them over mountains to attack
the Spaniards fortified in Guanajuato.
The Alhondiga with its walls of stone
looked quite invincible save for one door.
Could someone dodge the bullets of the guards
and light a fire beneath that wooden door?

One brave and clever soldier volunteered.
We later dubbed him "Turtle" for his scheme.
He strapped a slab of limestone to his back
to shield himself from Spanish fusillade.
He seized a flaming torch and staggered forth
with slow and tortuous effort, step by step.

We watched him anxiously, our turtle man,
who crawled beneath the hellish rain of death.
He faltered, but he fell beside the door
and fired it with his torch. It burned! We cheered!
And thus my army stormed the Alhondiga,
remembered now on Independence Day!

III. The Third Mural

He towers over mountains of white bones
and holds us with his eyes, his death's-head eyes.

I am Hidalgo, father of a dream–
the Godly dream of freedom for my people.
I dared to hope we might achieve that dream
in my own lifetime after Alhondiga
and other splendid victories we won.
But in the end the Royalists arrayed
such armies and such weaponry against
my men beside the Bridge of Calderon
that we lost all–all except the dream.

It must have seemed to some the very dream
was gone–my army scattered to the winds,
myself and other leaders hanged or shot.
Not satisfied with this, the Royalists
cut off our heads and hung them for display
on corners of the Alhondiga walls
as grisly warning to the Mexicans.

Yet never could they suffocate the cry,
the poignant cry, "El Grito de Dolores!"
It only sounded louder from the throats
of fallen heroes. Other valiant men
and women fought new wars or labored hard
in peace. Is it too soon to say the dream
is coming true at last for Mexico?

I am Hidalgo, and I charge you: Light
a candle for the One you love and serve,
and vow to keep *your* people brave and free!

2002

Written in early September, 2002, at the suggestion of my daughter Terri Hendry Sims, this poem was first printed September 10 in the program of the Interfaith Service of Remembrance and Unity, Huntsville, Alabama. In October the Honorable Bud Cramer read it in the United States House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., and published it in the Congressional Record. In November Bobby Patton, President of the Central Missouri State University, read it at the Annual Alumni Dinner in Warrensburg, Missouri. Since then, "Towers of Light" has been circulated by family members and friends. Dear reader, please accept it as a tribute to you and as a prayer for peace in our world.

Towers of Light

Two shafts of light
stream down through clouds
to bedrock of a crater
cleared of rubble and bones.

We look up, up, up
these twin towers of light
until we must shield our eyes
from their source, more luminous
than sun and moon and stars.

What is their source?
Not firestorm of planes
commandeered and exploded
in misbegotten piety and hate.
Not savage burning of
"heathen" temples or churches,
mosques or synagogues.
Not merciless holocaust
of "enemy" fields and forests,
schools and homes and people.

The source of light may
go by different names in
your religion and mine,
yet somehow the twin towers
remind us of two neighbors filled
with the radiance of the Golden Rule.

Neighbor from anywhere,
let us not quarrel about
holy names and ancient cruelties.
Let us fill the crater with loam
and plant a new garden on Earth.
In honor of heroes and loved ones,
let us summon the courage, wisdom,
and kindness to dwell in mutual peace.
Can we not become Towers of Light?

2002

Wick and I know each other pretty well, having been married since 1944. He is quite capable of surprising me, however, as this poem says. It was published in Love Poems by the Alabama State Poetry Society, 2002.

To My Husband

Other couples have rehearsed their lines:
the shared remembrances, the sallies,
classic jokes and pointed anecdotes.
They defer to one another
with practiced artistry,
delivering the smooth compliment,
the devastating touche.

But, you, dear Wick–
with your life-giving flame–
are totally unpredictable
and unconfined although
you claim I make the small decisions
and there are no large ones.
I never know what you will say.
After these fifty-odd years
(yes, very odd) you
keep me guessing...
and I love you.

2002

This light verse, written in the syllable count required for a Minute poem, won a Certificate of Merit from the National Federation of State Poetry Societies in 2002.

Morning Minute

Sylvester, where's your other shoe?
The bus is due!
Eat faster, Joan!
I've never known
a dawdler who out-dawdles you—
except for Sue!
Turn off the box!
Put on your socks!
O hurry, Johnny! Catch the bus!
Hurray for us!
Goodbye, my dears! ...
The cup that cheers...

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Goodbye, my dears! ...
The cup that cheers...

2002

Do you appreciate your computer? This limerick, written in 2002, comments.

Shaking a Spear

Consider, my friends, how unhappily muter
The Bard would have been if he'd had a computer.
His teeth would have gnashed
Whenever it crashed
And slaughtered his words like a stupid refuter.

2002

"Neighbor, Take This Torch of Peace" won honors in the Waging Peace Through Singing project sponsored by the University of Oregon in 2002. Dorothy Diemer Hendry wrote the text, and Emma Lou Diemer composed the music for youth chorus or chamber chorus and keyboard.

Neighbor, Take This Torch of Peace

Neighbor, take this torch of peace.
Run it down the line.
We will banish hateful darkness
where our torches shine.

Astronauts and angels watching
over us at night
say, "All continents are glowing.
What an awesome sight!"

People of the Earth are pledging
want and war will cease.
We are waging peace, good neighbor!
We are waging peace!

2002

In 2002, "Nobody Sighs While Singing" won honors in the "Waging Peace Through Singing" project sponsored by the University of Oregon with funding from the Carlton Savage Endowment for International Relations and Peace. Dorothy Diemer Hendry wrote the poem, and Emma Lou Diemer set it to music for two-part chorus and keyboard. Santa Barbara Music Publishing has accepted it for publication in 2003.

Nobody Sighs While Singing

Verse 1

Sometimes in our native land,
people need a helping hand.
Let us show them that we care,
gladly work and gladly share.
All of us together strong
like to sing this funny song.

Refrain

Nobody sighs while singing,
Tra-la-la, la-la-la-lee.
Nobody frowns while laughing,
Ho-ho-ho, ha-ha-ha-hee.
Nobody cries while yodeling,
Yo-do-lay, yo-do-lay-oo.
Nobody hates while hugging.
Do you mind if I hug you?

Verse 2

Sometimes in a distant land,
people need a helping hand.
Let us show them that we care,
gladly work and gladly share.
All of us together strong
like to sing this funny song. *Refrain*

Verse 3

Sometimes don't we feel so low
we could die in utter woe?
People show us that they care;
gladly work and gladly share.
All of us together strong
like to sing this funny song. *Refrain*

In 2002 I wrote this poem contrasting two ways of life. The heavy tread of feet marching to evil conquest is evident in the last two lines of the first stanza. In the second stanza the devil collects his usual prize from the "gory minions" who have foolishly followed him. In the third stanza we see a forward movement of people who have listened to a different voice, and we note that the verbs telling of this movement are not heavy and strident but gentle and purposeful. In the last stanza these people are recognized as "stewards of earth" and "angels of peace" who owe only the love in their "singing souls." Perhaps my sister or some other composer will set this poem to music for concert choir and orchestra.

Specters of War, Angels of Peace

Who is born to be the devil's minion?
No man. No woman.
Yet he speaks to us with forked tongue:
"For power, pomp, and glittering gold,
leave the common herd and follow me.
March with my legions; practice my ways.
Left, right, left, right, left, right, go wrong!
Covet, cheat, lie, steal, hate, rage, ravage, kill!"

The devil taunts his gory minions:
"Wretches, I led you to all I foretold,
to power, pomp, and glittering gold.
Now you shall pay me, you Specters of War.
Surrender your immortal souls
to fuel my fires forevermore."

Who is born to be an angel?
Any man! Any woman!
We hear a voice in flowing wind and water:
"Beloved daughters, beloved sons,
will you cherish Earth and share her blessings?
Move onward, faithful ones.
Some will walk, some will dance,
others you will carry.
Listen, learn, work, teach, heal, love, pray, rejoice!"

Blessed be the stewards of Earth,
the Angels of Peace!
What do we owe to Almighty God?
We offer the love in our singing souls
praising the goodness of God forever!
Alleluia! Alleluia!

2002

The First Presbyterian Church, Warrensburg, Missouri, commissioned my sister, Emma Lou Diemer, and me to write a hymn in celebration of their 150th anniversary in 2002. Accompanied by organ, the choir and congregation sang it. Sopranos in the choir enhanced the music with a descant. "Welcome to This Holy Church" is being published by Zimbel Press.

WELCOME TO THIS HOLY CHURCH

Dorothy Diemer Hendry, 2002 Warrensburg Emma Lou Diemer, 2002

1. Welcome to this Holy Church,
Yours as much as mine.
Here we keep a flame of hope—
Human, yet divine.

Refrain: Alleluia! Alleluia!
Keepers of the flame,
Come to learn; go forth to serve
In One Holy Name.

2. Welcome to our heritage.
Founders long ago
Dreamed of fair and sturdy walls
Wherein love would grow.

3. For one hundred fifty years [*or* All about us through the years]
Angels from above
Have encircled church and town
With immortal love.

4. Welcome to this Holy Church,
Strong in grace and form,
Sanctuary of the soul,
Shelter from the storm.

5. Welcome home, dear traveler,
From a world away.
Tell your story. Heal your wounds.
Sing with us today.

6. Winter, springtime, summer, fall,
We will gather here,
True as flowers near the cross
Blooming year on year.

2002

"Wedding Song" celebrated the wedding of Deanna Jean Augsburger and Edwin Dudley Burwell IV on Saturday, May 4, 2002, at the First United Methodist Church, Huntsville, Alabama. I wrote the words and Emma Lou Diemer composed the music for voice and organ. Emma Lou accompanied the soloist, soprano Anne Parris. Deanna's parents are Larry Augsburger and our eldest daughter Betty. Families of the bride and groom and several hundred guests participated in the happy festivities.

Wedding Song

Dear friends of the bride, dear friends of the groom,
God bless you for coming today
and giving Deanna and Eddie your love
as joyful as rosebuds in May.

O fair is the bride! O fine is the groom!
God bless them together for life
with faith to move mountains and hope to redeem
the world from its trouble and strife.

With love for each other, helpful and true,
God bless them in work and in play,
devoted to family, loyal to friends,
and joyful as rosebuds in May.

Ayla is the daughter of our granddaughter, Theresa Augsburger Tabi, and her husband, Timur Tabi. Born July 7, 2002, Ayla lives in Austin, Texas, with her devoted parents. Theresa, a graphics artist, and Timur, a computer programmer, painted the walls of the baby's room to look like a Texas prairie. In honor of this winsome great-granddaughter, I wrote a lullaby, and my sister, Emma Lou Diemer, set it to music for voice and keyboard. Theresa sings it to Ayla.

Lullaby for Ayla

Ayla, dear baby,
we painted your room
like a wild prairie
with flowers in bloom—
sunflowers, primroses,
bluebonnets, too.
O where is a flower
that's sweeter than you?

Butterflies flutter
by your little bed.
Dragonflies hover
near your downy head.
They are just painted
so don't cry a tear.
Mommy and Daddy
watch over you, dear.

Sunflowers, primroses,
bluebonnets, too—
nowhere is a flower
that's sweeter than you!

2002

Emma Lou Diemer composed the music for choir and organ after I wrote the words for this wedding hymn. It was played and sung at the wedding of our great-niece Jessicah Krey and Christopher Duckworth at the First Presbyterian Church, Germantown, Pennsylvania, October 12, 2002. It has been published by National Music Publishers.

On This Wedding Day

1. On this wedding day we find
Love in bloom for humankind.
Comes a new song from the skies
Thrilling us with glad surprise.

Refrain:
Glory, glory be to God
For a song of love diurnal!
Glory, glory be to God
For a song of love eternal!

2. Jessicah, your gallant knight
Waits for you in holy light.
Christopher, your lady true
Walks in loveliness for you.

Refrain

3. Dear hearts all, O sing this song:
Love be faithful, love be strong,
Sharing courage, hope, and cheer
Day by day and year by year.

Refrain

2003

Composer Emma Lou Diemer selected the poem below as one of six poems for her Songs for the Earth for chorus and orchestra. The San Francisco Choral Society commissioned this work and will premiere it in 2004.

Experiment

Nowhere in the cosmos—
nowhere among the glowing
beakers of God's laboratory—
moves and breathes another body
like unto you, O Earth—
fragile, beauteous Mother
of all plants and creatures—
even of our fractious human selves.

Help us to understand you,
Mother Earth, and to respect
your other children.
Gentle our spirits lest
we so hurt and maim you
that God, before he heals
you, hurls our loveless
cinders into a black hole of
failed experiments.

2003

Mary Cassatt's painting "Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child" is the basis for this poem, which won an honorable mention in the Alabama State Poetry Society spring contest, 2003.

An Ordinary Moment

Little sleepyhead, let me hold you in my lap
and wash you before I tuck you into bed.
We need to sponge your grubby face and hands
and scrub your knees and toes.

What a day you've had! Such wild adventures
with my balls of yarn and our old scratchy cat!
I'm not surprised your blond curls look so tousled
and your cheeks so rosy red.

Is the water in this china basin warm enough?
Yes, just right.
But I must pause a moment to look at you,
your smiling rosebud lips and your blue eyes
with their long lashes nearly closing,
ready to drift off to Dreamland.

Do you know what I wish, my child?
That I could keep this moment,
paint it in my mind, save it in my heart,
and never, never, never let it go.

2003

This hymn text was set to music by Emma Lou Diemer. The hymn is being published in 2003 by Zimbel Press, Webster, New York.

Cosmic Windows

Cosmic windows tell of Thee,
Maker of infinity.
Guide our telescope in space
To wondrous star-paths of Thy grace.

Micro windows show us life–
Molecules with colors rife
Cast in tenfold symmetry
And fired with Thy divinity.

Homely windows shine with joy:
Man or woman, girl or boy
Might Thy Kingdom here begin
By looking out or looking in.

Stained-glass windows light our way
To commune with Thee today.
Radiant God in Heaven above,
O make us windows of Thy love.

Our Huntsville Literary Association Poets' Workshop, led by artist and poet Jack Dempsey, meets each month. We read our latest poems and give each other helpful critiques. Once a year we invite guests to hear readings of our poems. Since my illness prevented me from attending the reading in February, 2003, Wick and Betty attended in my place. My friend Nancy Williams read "Family Tree," which was published in Poets' Choice.

Family Tree

Have you heard? The oak is America's National Tree.
Congress and the President have decreed that
any member of *Quercus*, the oak genus, qualifies,
whatever its color, origin, age, size, home district,
drinking problems, and sexual practices, such as
male and female flowers cohabiting on the same twig.
Seriously, we Americans love our mighty oaks,
and we want to tell family stories about them.

Forty years ago, Wick and our four children climbed
Green Mountain and gathered acorns from an oak
rooted in rock on the summit. "These acorns want to
grow," Wick told the children. "They're like you."

They came down from the mountain with pockets
filled with acorns, fully three centimeters long,
egg-shaped, with green coats and knobby brown caps.
Bonny, our youngest, polished the most awesome acorn
with her fingers and carried it to school for Show and Tell.

Her friend Adam eyed it and asked, "Wanta
swap your ol' nut for my blue agate?"

"Nope!" Bonny shot back. "My daddy says
this acorn wants to grow!"

We tilled a plot of rich red soil and tucked
the acorns into bed. After they sprang up and
grew leafy limbs, we let the children give all but
one of the saplings to neighbors so that native oaks
would flourish alongside pampered gardens of
azaleas, vegetables, herbs, and multicolored roses.

The one we kept stretched hungry roots
and restless branches, drank torrents of rain
and melted snow, and colored its leaves

green with sunlight or red-brown with frost.
It made much of all seasons and reached for
the stars. It grew so tall that our grandchildren
dared each other to climb it "halfway to Mars."
Our oak sways with wild winds, but it does not break.
Myriads of creatures rely on its strength,
and after a storm we join them in singing.

An oaken blessing to you from me:
Live with the might of your family tree!

Having the cancer named multiple myeloma, I am thinking of the mysteries of life and death. Now in August, 2003, I feel grateful for eighty-five years of abundant living with people I love, and I do not fear the future. Dear reader, you may be much more certain than I am about what happens beyond the grave. I wish you continued blessings.

The Mind

The mind is more than a brain.
It sings its own kind of music
and swims with dolphins in lazuline seas.
It ranges from molten depths of Earth
to gelid heights of Everest
and rings celestial bells.
It hurries home with love and roses
and bakes the daily bread.

The mind is more than a brain.
It hungers for knowledge
like a new Eve, a new Adam.
It tills and harvests gardens
it most intimately knows.
In these gardens,
it meets other minds,
wondrous minds, kindred or dissimilar,
and learns to prize their
courage, passion, and tenderness,
their joyful love and awe.

The mind is more than a brain.
It mocks with raucous laughter
satanic liars and despots.
It weeps hot tears of remorse
for its own wrongdoings
and prays in the aura
of the Old Rugged Cross.

The mind is more than a brain.
It sits amid synapses and cells
that will soon dissolve
and fall into decay.
What will the mind do then?

The mind is more than a brain.
It perches between two infinities of time,
two infinities of distance,
and ponders: *Will my loves,*
my precious loves, rejoin me where I go?
And is there a Greater Love that
will embrace us and make us whole?

Generations

Thankful are we for our contemporaries-those who share our blessed time on Earth.
They are our boon companions, fulfilling each day of our lives.

Thankful are we for the older, wiser, more loving generations of men and women.
According to God's plan, they are giving us breath and sustenance and teaching us how to live.

And are we not even more thankful for being links to the younger generations who challenge us and delight us? We try to help them grow in knowledge and brilliance, and often they exceed our fondest hopes and dreams.

From generation to generation, let us celebrate our families, yours and mine, and all our great struggling, striving, well-intentioned human race.

God help us feel and live the poetry of generations!

Dorothy Diemer Hendry