

INTRODUCTION

The half-decade between the second of January 1986 and the eleventh of October 1990, as I chronicled it, in over eight hundred poems, including some incomplete and fragmental pieces, would prove to be the most desperate, hysterical, stressful, and melancholic days imaginable, in the lives of my wife, Jan, and me and our two frightened and confused children, Trilogy and Troika. Those five years had their transitory moments of joy and closeness; however, more often, the days were volcanic, and we watched our homes in Farmington and St. Louis disintegrate. It was as if I and Jan were Lot and his wife, both looking back, watching Sodom and Gomorrah burn. With our defilement of each other's trust, our marriage had indeed turned into a pillar of salt.

Those same five years saw my hopes for a new beginning, my recommitment to the marriage vows Jan and I had taken in San Francisco's Sutro Park, on July 8, 1970, come to naught, take their last gasping breaths, die an ignoble death, in the sterile, dispassionate, indifferent courthouse of Clayton, Missouri, but not before Jan and I had systematically destroyed all that we'd taken at least twenty years to build.

The end may have all begun with our decision, in 1984, while we were still comfortably ensconced in our Victorian house, at 628 West Columbia Street, in Farmington, Missouri, a town with a population of 8500, to move to St. Louis, thereby affording our children (Trilogy then ten, Troika seven) better educational opportunities.

Though the big city was only seventy miles to the northeast, it might as well have been three continents away, for the social and cultural opportunities it offered. But Jan and I had misgivings about leaving our country home, even though the thought of keeping our kids in Farmington public schools was worrisome to us both. We had great respect for education and were concerned that the apathy inherent in the rural academic system would disadvantage our children, leave them unable to compete.

One of the chief objections we had about moving was a fear that we might disappear into the anonymity of the large city, become just another number on a mailbox, a real-estate-tax receipt — small fish in the Mississippi River, no longer big ones in Farmington's pond, where everyone knew everyone and where what we thought, said, and did mattered. Despite Farmington's lack of excitement, we wanted to stay, not change a thing, live out our lives, in that serene small town. Nonetheless, our responsibility, we resolved, was to our children, and to that end, we sacrificed our known world. Aware that it would be a difficult adjustment, we took the risk, accepted the possible consequences as the price we might have to pay, to advance our children's futures.

In the summer of 1984, we rented a house in the St. Louis suburb of Clayton, where, over forty years earlier, during the Second World War, I had grown up, gone to elementary school — the same school (Glenridge) both our children would soon attend. At first, we didn't entertain the idea of selling our home in Farmington. I was still working as the manager of slack outlets for Biltwell, which, in 1982, my father sold to Interco, International Shoe Company's successful conglomerate, and I continued to spend two or three nights a week in our Farmington house. Often, when there, I'd sit out on the back patio, with my notebook, pen,

and spatula, drinking wine, barbecuing for myself, and writing poignant, elegiac poems; “May Day” (04130, 5/1/86) is one of a number in this vein. The silence, the absence of my family, the vacant swing set, the desolation often caused me to grow deeply sorrowful. These poems reflect the passing of a special era, aura. I saw myself as a ghost. Without my family, our house was a mausoleum, in which I hated staying overnight. Paradoxically, that glorious Victorian mansion was empty of its family yet fully furnished with the American antiques we and our friends had so reveled in, during the ’70s and early ’80s. In that house, by myself, I’d become melancholic, with happy memories.

Also, I continued making trips to Mississippi, though much less frequently. I wrote ten Southern poems in 1986, only three in 1987, and just four in 1988, the year I last attended the Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, in Oxford. Like my first visits to Yoknapatawpha, between 1976 and 1980, those I made between 1986 and 1990 were benign, innocuous. I wasn’t looking to tryst with Southern belles, in Bailey’s Woods and Oxford’s steamy purlieus, or spend escapist week-ends in Memphis or Jackson or New Orleans. I could not and would not tolerate that kind of dissolute behavior any longer. I had battered fences to mend, and I fully intended to reenergize my marriage, start my family life over again.

Despite weaning myself from Oxford, I was still totally enthralled by the Faulkner mystique. My deep friendship with Bob Hamblin, a professor of English at Southeast Missouri State University, helped keep my passion for Faulkner scholarship kindled, including the multi-volume *Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the Brodsky Collection* series we had committed to publishing with the University Press of Mississippi. In 1987, the press brought out Faulkner’s *Country Lawyer and Other Stories for the Screen*. In 1989, both the fifth volume of the *Comprehensive Guide* series, *Manuscripts and Documents*, and *Stallion Road: A Screenplay by William Faulkner*, appeared.

As if all this work hadn’t been enough, I lost myself to a fifth Faulkner project, gathering and revising those of my Faulkner essays, interviews, and articles which had been published over the previous five years or so. From these pieces, I wove together a book I titled *William Faulkner, Life Glimpses*, which would be published by the University of Texas Press, in 1990. Making this book gave me a tremendous sense of pride. Indeed, all of my Faulkner work over these five years was a blessed, necessary break from the stresses and pain my home life caused me.

In 1987, with my parents’ help, Jan and I purchased a large house, at 22 Hillvale, in Clayton, and in April 1988, bowing to financial pressures, we put our Farmington home up for sale. We had lived at 628 West Columbia since 1969. In the signing of a deed to our new house, nineteen years dissolved before our eyes. Our Farmington adventure was over.

But Jan and I were being given a chance to start over. The new dwelling, a two-story Tudor, built, in 1929, of brick, stone, half-timbering, stained-glass windows, and slate roof with dormers, was magnificent. In its manner, it was every bit as beautiful as the residence we had finally, with vast reluctance, relinquished.

We eagerly engaged in our kids' school functions, made an effort to meet and befriend our neighbors, who were more numerous and considerably younger than those we'd known in Farmington. I became involved in Cub Scouts and soccer, to be closer to Troika. Jan took Trilogy to dance classes. Jan and I volunteered in everything from classroom presentations to field trips. We were well on our way toward making a fine circle of friends. Above all, we wanted to have Trilogy and Troika, just up from the country, fit in, feel accepted, flourish socially and culturally.

During this time, life in St. Louis was hectic, especially after we'd lived so long in Farmington's slower rhythms. All of a sudden, Jan found herself constantly busy, coordinating our children's activities, and she became actively engaged in teaching aerobics classes for the YMCA.

For three years after we'd first moved to St. Louis, in 1984, I needed to be in Farmington, where I had my flagship store and distribution center, from which I organized shipments to my six other factory outlets. During the weeks, I might as easily be in Farmington as St. Louis.

All of it was a turmoil, a perpetual chaos, an endlessly stressful frenzy, with my being absent for a day or more at a time and with Jan running in and out of the house, between aerobics classes, doing things for the kids, and, increasingly, going off on missions mysterious to me — she had chores to do, friends to meet, things to return. I could not fully fathom that she was surfeiting her appetite for freedom, something which, as a nurturing mother in Farmington, she had sacrificed.

She was making connections, and our link was diminishing to a point of nonexistence. Gradually, over the next three years, this would become irreversibly apparent to me. She and I were rarely together, and when we were, it was perfunctory, for the children's sake.

In 1986, we took a family trip, to visit my sister Dale, who lived in Oakland, California, with her husband and young son. We stayed for a few days, before driving across the bay, to San Francisco, that mystical place where Jan and I were married, sixteen years earlier, then on to Sausalito and up through the Napa Valley. We found it very uncomfortable, being so close. In making our vacation plans, I had hoped that this trip with our two children might form the basis for a rededication of our marriage. But Jan and I shared no intimacy, and the trip failed miserably; it was a travesty of our elopement in July of 1970.

By then, pressures of our move to the city were weighing heavily on Jan, and St. Louis seemed to be proving too tempting for her. I felt pained, watching her transformation.

In 1987, I decided to leave Biltwell. After managing my outlet stores for almost two decades, I'd finally wearied of road travel. I felt I'd paid my dues. In truth, I had begun losing interest in the position, in 1982, when, after fifty-two years, my father cut his ties with the men's trouser company he'd incorporated in 1929. I hung on for those five years, but working for my dad's successor, Ed Baum, a contemporary of mine, just wasn't the same.

I realized that I needed to begin gathering my poems, written steadily, honestly, devotedly, fervidly, over the two decades since I'd graduated from Washington University. In the fall of 1987, I turned the third floor of

our home into my writing office, where, no longer a salaried employee, I settled in for what I thought would be a long, pleasant spell of composing. But Jan found my presence at home intolerable; the house was her domain and my being there all day interfered with her lifestyle.

In 1988, I secured an unrented space in Le Chateau Village, a building owned by my father, five miles west of Clayton, not only allowing me to get out of my house but motivating me to start a publishing company. It was important for me to go to an office, consider myself an entrepreneur again, and have a purposive routine to follow. I missed my work at the factory in Farmington and my visits to the slack-outlet stores, but the dream I had nurtured since graduate school — to harvest my work, give my poems their place in literary history — was finally becoming reality.

To fulfill my dream, I would have to formulate a business plan, one which would detail work functions and a printing schedule. I chose a name, for my new enterprise, that had a poetic, vowel-chiming ring to it: Timeless Press. At first, it would be the vehicle for publishing my own work. With luck, I would discover other literary properties that would satisfy my sensibility as to what constituted great poetry, works I could add to the company's publication list.

It so happened that a small data-processing firm occupied the office across from mine. After discussing options with the owners, I began supplying them with volumes of my early verse, which they input via word-processing. My idea was to have all my poems readily available on PC, so that I might easily draw from them, thematically, to create new books for Timeless Press.

I hired, as my first editor, a friend of mine, from my Washington University days — Linda Hermelin, who'd shared many graduate English classes with me. Working part-time, she assisted in preparing three books of my poetry, for Timeless Press: *You Can't Go Back, Exactly* (1988), *The Thorough Earth* (1989), and *Four and Twenty Blackbirds Soaring* (1989). Grammar, punctuation, and spelling were never my strengths (imagination was my poetic stock in trade), but fortunately for my poems, they were Linda's. Her final editorial contribution to my work focused on helping me complete *William Faulkner, Life Glimpses*, published by University of Texas Press, in 1990.

To this day, I'm certain that starting my publishing company saved my life. In fact, during those troubled years, I had no other life, nowhere to go and no one to turn to. Running Timeless Press was the only purpose I had for living, during a time in which I was persona non grata in my own house.

Jan and I were on a collision course with divorce, although it would take us fully five grueling years of heartache and disillusionment to bring closure to our painful, irreconcilable estrangement.

One of the reasons for this prolongation was that Jan and I believed in living spontaneously, without regard for planning and practicality. We shared a disastrous and, ultimately, self-defeating refusal to deal with the truth. We were doomed, finally, to have reality make us accountable for the consequences of our irreverence, our eccentricity, our immaturity, our irresponsibility. Those who elope, hide outside society, try to lead

a spiritual life without the strictures of traditional religion, pretend love will always protect them, against the enemy, eventually run the risk of succumbing to their own delusions. We certainly did.

Temptations seemed to be luring Jan away, and I lost track of her. The life we had known together became irretrievable. We had taken to separate bedrooms. Neither of us made any pretenses toward caring about making love or even bothering to pay lip-service to intimacy. Affection became a stranger.

My former apostasy was being brought home to me. I was lonely and wounded, and there seemed little I could do to stop the destruction. I could see divorce looming, threatening everything we'd worked so hard to build.

It was obvious that my valuable Faulkner collection, which I'd spent almost thirty years gathering, was vulnerable to being split up, as part of a settlement. I made my intentions clear to Bill Stacy, the president of Southeast Missouri State University, where my books and papers were being kept on deposit, that I would be amenable to transferring ownership of the collection to the school, provided it could meet my requirements. Bill, a former member of the Speech Communication and Theatre Department, recognized, at once, the immense potential benefits to the school of its acquiring one of the world's premier William Faulkner collections. I didn't have the heart to see it brought up to impersonal auction at Sotheby's or Christie's and summarily dispersed, just to satisfy a divorce-court order.

In October 1988, I entered into a binding agreement with Southeast Missouri State University, to transfer title of my Faulkner archive, in return for payments spread out over twenty years, in equal monthly installments made to me and my wife. At least, that way, the collection would remain intact. The agreement also included additional compensation, in the form of services to be rendered by Southeast Missouri State University's printing department, which would set, print, and bind Timeless Press's first ten or so books.

Between 1986 and 1990, my poems took many unpredictable forms, and I often wrote like a man possessed of a desperation, anger, and sadness I'd never before experienced, imagining myself a victim or a survivor of Nazi intimidation, Gestapo cruelty. Often sublimating my unhappiness into compositions with a Holocaust tenor, I wrote four of the twelve Holocaust poems that appear in *The Thorough Earth*, published by Timeless Press, in 1989, and twenty of the forty-eight poems that comprise *Gestapo Crows*, including "Hazards of a Mixed Marriage" (04234, 12/2/89 — [1]), "An American Holocaust" (00965, 2/4/90 — [2]), and "[Flying debris from a cosmic chimney]" (00466, [11/10/89]). In poems like these, I perversely channeled my pain into the horror which, my reading told me, disenfranchised Jews in Germany, Poland, Austria, Hungary, and elsewhere must have felt when they were marked for extermination. In addition, I composed twenty-two of my twenty-five poems that appear in the book I coauthored with William Heyen, *Falling from Heaven: Holocaust Poems of a Jew and a Gentile*, which would be published in 1991, by Time Being Books.

Within my family, I saw myself as the pariah Jew, singled out to die in the fires of marital discord. Watching my marriage dissolve, envisioning the loss of my children, imagining the immense loneliness that would attend the aftermath, I identified with those unfinished lives, those six million Jews who died in the Holocaust.

Nonetheless, I realized that this identification had its limitations, since my emotions weren't fraught with any real possibility that I might perish. Though there were only thirteen poems of this nature, I placed them in the last section ("The Final Dis-Solution — Today's Family") of my 1992 book *Gestapo Crows: Holocaust Poems*. I was fully aware that they could be received as self-serving, inauthentic, grotesquely inappropriate, especially to survivors of the Holocaust, for their conflated metaphors, and I had determined, even then, never to include them when I'd eventually publish my complete Holocaust poems.

Toward the end of September 1989, after considerable correspondence with Bill Heyen, I flew up to visit him and his wife, at their home, in Brockport, New York. The purpose of the trip was to solidify a series of contracts whereby Timeless Press would publish five of Heyen's volumes of poetry.

During that productive visit, on the floor of Bill's downstairs study, he and I pieced together *Falling from Heaven*. I selected twelve of my favorites from his book *Erika: Poems of the Holocaust*, to which he added thirteen recently written poems; he chose, from my large collection of Holocaust poems, twenty-five he felt would best relate to his. That collaboration was so intense that it would bind us in a communion of spirits, even though, in subsequent years, we'd come to experience differences of opinion, in dealing with publishing decisions, that would keep us from pursuing further mutual literary projects.

On myriad levels, the appearance of that book would prove to be momentous. For one thing, it would mark my company's first publication of an author other than myself — indeed, a highly celebrated American poet, who was immersed in the Holocaust. For another, shaping *Falling from Heaven*, with Bill, helped legitimize not only my interest in the Holocaust but my right to deal with the subject. Moreover, it reminded me that no one "owns" the Holocaust and that when one confronts the grisly, abject truth of that vast horror, there should be no distinctions between human beings — Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, atheists, agnostics. In our book, while our styles are dissimilar, our voices are tuned to the same key.

Making *Falling from Heaven* reinforced, in me, the awareness that Jan and I were hapless victims of forces beyond our control as well as perpetrators of our own undoing — not just Catholic and Jew but two irretrievably misguided lovers unable to rise from the pyre of our smoldering marriage.

The pain that prompted those *Falling* poems had touched each member of my family, and yet neither Jan nor I knew how to negate it. 1987, we sent our son, Troika, age nine, to Camp Nebagamon for his first summer. Jan hated the idea of his leaving for a month. I felt this hiatus from our family tensions might be a godsend for our young son,

as it indeed proved to be, just as it had been for me, more than three decades earlier.

In 1951, the summer of my tenth year, my parents sent me off to Camp Nebagamon for Boys, in northern Wisconsin, while they oversaw our move from Clayton to the then-westernmost edges of St. Louis County — a suburb named Ladue. I would grow so fond of Nebagamon, during my years as a camper and counselor, that I would never lose touch with it, even after spending my last summer there, in 1968.

The camp had a legendary director, Max J. “Muggs” Lorber, who, along with Leo Durocher (who would become a historic major-league manager), had coached my teenaged father, in Sunday-morning baseball in St. Louis’s Forest Park, the city’s municipal grounds. I looked up to five-foot-six larger-than-life Muggs, who had quarterbacked Indiana University’s 1924 varsity football team, earned All-American status, and also lettered in basketball, baseball, and track. Muggs was a man’s man, after whom I patterned all my images and aspirations.

I wanted the same for Troika, through that renewal of camaraderie, although, in 1988, his camp experience was altered slightly. Earlier in the year, we had learned that Jan’s brother, Eric, the same age as I, was suffering the ravages of bone cancer. In the beginning, we believed his malady wasn’t life-threatening; he was too young — just forty-seven. But by April, his condition was dire, and in late June, we all gathered in La Salle-Peru, Illinois, to attend his funeral.

Jan and I did what we could to keep up a respectful and respectable front, for our children’s sake and for her family’s. We were devastated by Eric’s death, and for that short time, we were able to set aside our personal problems. Still, I couldn’t look her in the eyes, nor could she look into mine.

Because attending Eric’s funeral caused Troika to miss the start of Camp Nebagamon’s season, by a few days, I flew, with him, to Minneapolis and on to Duluth, then drove him to the camp. Once there, I stayed with him for the first three days of his second summer visit — this time two full sessions, for him, totaling eight weeks away from home.

Those days were ones of inestimable bonding between Troika and me. While staying there, with him, living in the camp’s Big House (the 1890s Weyerhaeuser family’s summer compound, at Lake Nebagamon), I wrote seven poems, including “Accompanying My Son to Summer Camp” (00022, 6/26/88) and “Male Bonding” (00028, 6/30/88 — [1]), completed one more, immediately upon returning home, to St. Louis, and composed a final one, “The Fountain of Youth” (00029, 7/30/88 — [2]), while flying home after visiting Troika again, a month later, at the start of the second four-week session.

Soon, I realized that these nine poems presented a unique opportunity for me to put closure to a series of Camp Nebagamon poems I’d been compiling, sporadically, since 1966, poems about a young boy growing into manhood, rite-of-passage poems I’d been writing about myself, in relation to the microcosmic world of Camp Nebagamon for Boys. Furthermore, as I began assessing the whole group of verse spanning my time there — the seven summers I had been a camper, beginning in 1951,

when I was a ten-year-old, progressing through six more, as a counselor, then moving to my role as father of a son who was perpetuating this cycle — I saw a very poignant book rising up out the two decades' worth of poems, capped by those I'd just written while accompanying Troika to Nebagamon.

And I had the perfect motivation for bringing them together. The present directors of the camp, Nardie and Sally Stein (Sally was Muggs and Janet Lorber's daughter), had decided to host a celebration, in Duluth's Radisson hotel as well as at camp, to commemorate Nebagamon's sixtieth anniversary, in September of 1988, a month after the finish of the camp season. What better opportunity for me to present my camp poems? Immediately upon hearing of this reunion, I set about making a book which I'd dedicate to the Lorbers and the Steins.

As I labored on these special poems, I obsessed over naming the book. In 1983, four years before Troika started as a camper at Nebagamon, the Steins invited me to visit camp, for four days, as part of the Trails Forward program, intended to introduce current campers to former campers with interesting vocations. I, as a poet, would encourage the boys to open themselves to the flora and fauna of the North Woods, translate their sensitized impressions into lyric form. Flying north, to Minneapolis, then on to Duluth, and driving the thirty miles southeast, to Lake Nebagamon, into camp, for the program, I reflected, in verse, on how much the journey had changed since the days of my youth, realizing that flying to Minneapolis and then being bused from there, to camp, had been the norm, for many years.

The piece, called "You Can't Go Back, Exactly" (00019, 7/1/83), recounts how trains helped define my camping experience. Summers, from 1951 through 1957, as part of a contingent of fifty to seventy-five other St. Louis kids, I'd journey to Camp Nebagamon, from St. Louis's Union Station, on Market Street, to Chicago's Union Station (via the Gulf, Mobile, & Ohio's Ann Rutledge or Abraham Lincoln streamline diesel-engine trains), where we'd have dinner at the Fred Harvey Restaurant, before being ferried across town, in Parmalee cabs, to the Northwestern Station, where, joined by at least another sixty or seventy campers, we'd board our chartered Soo Line or Chicago & North Western train, made up of pre-World War II Pullman sleeper cars, which an ancient steam locomotive would drag all the way up the north shore of Lake Michigan, stopping at Highland Park, then in Milwaukee, before chugging straight into the white-birch and towering-red-and-white-pine wilds of northern Wisconsin. It was an overnight odyssey that any boy of ten or twelve or fifteen would find more exciting than almost anything else he might imagine in a dozen lifetimes, a trip that would deposit him, us, by the tracks, early the next morning, in the pine-scented purlieus of either Hillcrest or Hawthorne, Wisconsin...blink-and-miss-it junctions, both within eight miles of the tiny village of Lake Nebagamon, Wisconsin, home to Camp Nebagamon for Boys.

While those wondrous trains had become a thing of the past, the poem "You Can't Go Back, Exactly" reprised the excitement of taking the railways to camp. This point was crucial, quintessential to the whole

experience, demarcating the generations. I could return to the sacred land of my youth but not as I'd gone there before. Not-so-subtle differences had crept in; I was a victim of change. The camp was the same, but I was not. I'd grown older, grown away from my youth. I knew *You Can't Go Back, Exactly* was the perfect title for my new book, which became the first volume published by Timeless Press, in 1988. Everyone who attended the reunion received a copy of it.

My love of trains had been instilled, in me, throughout my childhood, on visits to camp and even earlier, on journeys with my father. He understood how they thrilled me, stimulated my imagination, and between the ages of eight and twelve or thirteen, I'd occasionally accompany him, on his business trips from St. Louis to New York, aboard the Pennsylvania and New York Central lines. Sixty years later, I still have vivid memories of my dad and me eating in dining cars manned by white-uniformed black Pullman waiters, the two of us playing gin rummy, in club cars, and sleeping snugly, securely, in those compact roomettes he'd reserve.

When we were in New York together, he'd always encourage me to indulge in the fabulous electric-train displays at FAO Schwarz's Fifth Avenue store, just across the street from the Savoy-Plaza Hotel, where he'd take two suites, one for his week-long residence (for more than a quarter-century, he spent twenty-six weeks a year in Manhattan), the other for his Biltwell office/showroom, from which he'd sell his men's dress trousers to America's finest retailers. I was always dazzled by the extravagant model-railroad set-ups FAO boasted, on their second floor. Most mesmerizing to me were the Lionel smoke-belching, cast-metal Magne-Traction black locomotives and colorful plastic-sheathed diesel engines, though I also loved their variously hued and logoed freight cars and gleaming, aluminum-sided, illuminated passenger cars and the Plasticville towns and cities through which they endlessly traveled. My dad would make sure that I never left New York without at least one new addition to my train set. And when I wasn't with him, he would bring home a Lionel train car or accessory for my growing basement layout, just to let me know that he had missed me.

The American mystique of the train, and the rail journeys themselves, awoke memories that had a stabilizing effect on me, in a time of profound personal turmoil; they evoked a simpler, uncomplicated, innocent era.

August 1988 marked not only the publication of *You Can't Go Back, Exactly* but also the final vacation Jan, I, and our two children would ever make as a family. Although our visit to Fort Lauderdale was not a happy occasion, I was able to write one poem to commemorate our sojourn there: "Surfers, Nurse Sharks, and Us" (02178, 8/27/88). We'd brought the tension with us, from St. Louis.

From 1986 to 1990, I recorded the fever chart of our marriage's disintegration, in 162 poems, which, eventually, I came to classify by the working title *The Final Dis-Solution*, a distortion of the Nazi code phrase "The Final Solution."

In 1984, the year we moved from Farmington to St. Louis, into our rented house in Clayton, I only composed six poems expressing my

disillusion, sadness, and confusion over our deteriorating relationship. In 1986, I wrote just five of those ugly *Final Dis-Solution* poems. What, in 1987, increased to seventeen poems of unhappiness grew disproportionately, to forty-three *Final Dis-Solution* poems, in 1988, including “Losing You” (02010, 1/19/88 — [2]); “Caught in the Act” (04109, 3/25/88 — [1]); “A Plague on Our House” (04107, 4/25/88); “Dissolution” (04105, 4/27/88 — [2]); “Obsequies of Adultery” (04103, 5/9/88); “Eden’s Diseased Trees” (02182, 9/15/88); “Decree of Dissolution” (02171, 10/4/88); “Locked Out” (02168, 10/6/88 — [1]); “Saving the Marriage” (01012, 12/3/88).

Furthering the challenge, Trilogy and Troika had never quite bridged the gap between Farmington and Clayton. Insecure and self-conscious, they hadn’t seemed to achieve a sense of belonging, among the children of Clayton’s affluent families. Now, to make things worse, the fallout arising from our marital discord was causing our children great embarrassment when they were with their schoolmates. Though I’ll never know the depth of their pain and fear, in that tumultuous time, it seemed apparent that their identities were being scarred, their spirits diminished, their futures compromised, by the legacy Jan and I, in our demoralized desperation, were bequeathing them.

During 1989, I wrote fifty-seven *Final Dis-Solution* poems, bearing witness to the steady erosion of our marriage. Living in our divided house became intolerable. I spent most of my waking hours away from home, at my writing office, on the road, traveling to Cape Girardeau, to work with my friend Bob Hamblin, on the Faulkner collection, which now belonged to Southeast Missouri State University, or driving to Farmington, to teach my night class, at Mineral Area College, in Flat River. Five poems written during that year speak eloquently of the corruption and finality of our condition: “Flotsam from a Wrecked Marriage” (02288, 1/5/89); “Irreversible Damage” (00464, 3/11/89); “The End of the Line” (00297, 5/9/89); “The Heart’s Archipelago” (04219, 9/6/89 — [2]); and “The L.D. and Jan Show Goes off the Air” (04207, 12/27/89).

In 1989, despite the anguish and turmoil, the fear, desperation, uncertainty, and pain, of watching my family disappear into an abyss, I was able to publish *The Thorough Earth*, my first book of Holocaust poems (which were juxtaposed with traveling-salesman poems), and *Four and Twenty Blackbirds Soaring*, a poetic sampler consisting of six motifs: imagination, alienation, love, poetry, the heartland, and transcendence. These titles were the second and third to be produced in the print shop at Southeast Missouri State.

In June 1989, with Timeless Press just off the ground, I set out, tremulously, on my own. Jan was busy networking, doing what she could to mollify her unhappiness. What Jan wanted was not within my purview.

In August 1989, hoping to advance the stature of Timeless Press and my personal reputation as a poet, I hired Keith Dinsmore, a representative for a national public-relations firm based in St. Louis. For a retainer, he would help promote Timeless Press, put its name before the public.

Not long after coming to work for me, Keith announced, with startling certainty, that he’d met a woman whom he felt I must get to know. He

made it seem as if I had no choice. He would take care of the arrangements. No more than an acquaintance to either of us, he had a vision that she and I were meant for each other. Why I should trust him, I had no idea, but I did — enough, anyway, while I was still living at my Clayton home, to allow him to invite this mystery lady to join him and me for dinner at Busch's Grove, a restaurant located not far from my writing office.

At twilight on August 10, I drove to Busch's Grove and found Keith with a lady he introduced to me as Jane Goldberg, a not-so-recent divorcée with two children. The three of us talked briefly at the table; then, Keith excused himself to make a call. He never returned. Jane and I kept talking, exploring the similarity of our family predicaments, wondering, all the while, where Keith was. When we finished dinner, she scribbled a cryptic note on a paper napkin, explaining to me that this single word was the key to the universe and that if I would allow her, she would teach me how to say it: "NO."

The night was a high-water mark, a spell cast over me, by a beguiling magician. But it would be two months before Jane and I would see each other again — the seventh of October, to be exact, when I would screw up the courage to ask her to join me on a trip downtown, to see Laclede's Landing, Eads Bridge, Eero Saarinen's Gateway Arch and have lunch.

Afterwards, I wrote a poem called "Opening Up the Territory" (03428, 10/10/89). It would become the prologue to *Forever, for Now: Poems for a Later Love* (Time Being Books, 1991), a daring fifty-one-poem book chronicling the first year of my romance with Jane. The poem looks back, to my youth — train trips to Camp Nebagamon and to New York, with my dad — and forward, to my future with Janie. The title of this poem evokes Mark Twain's Huck Finn and his companion, Jim, floating down the Mississippi, on a raft, lighting out for the territory. In it, I recount when Janie and I drove down to Laclede's Landing "To pay homage to Eads Bridge / And count cars of freight trains, / Like saying rosary, / As they swayed and screeched over trestles / Suspending them in our imaginations," concluding with the two of us, "complete strangers, / ...waiting to progress our uncompleted memories, / Before venturing west, together, / In search of a fresh conception of love." Janie and I needed to cut loose of old ties, head west, metaphorically, together, in search of release from all that had encumbered us individually. I loved this poem, and I loved this new lady in my life. She held the promise of untrammelled freedom of expression for me.

I wouldn't see Jane again for another month, until November. I remember getting cold feet, feeling guilty for seeking out female companionship while I was still married, still living at home, no matter that the marriage Jan and I shared was dysfunctional and all but defunct.

On my second date with Jane, feeling so passionate about trains, the most romantic place I could think to take her was to the railroad station in Kirkwood, a turn-of-the-century Victorian depot, where passenger trains bound east and west sporadically arrive and depart and a vast number of freight trains snake through its red-blinking crossing gates, at unpredict-

able intervals. The poem I wrote to record our excursion, “Watching for Trains” (03402, 11/11/89), was highly erotic. I’d never sublimated such sexual fervor into a poem. It incorporated all the undefined libido that was seething inside me, aching to break out, express itself in physical release, the first two stanzas describing a slowly approaching freight train that finally passes within a few feet of us:

For nearly ten minutes,
That five-engined, ninety-five-car freight,
Out of sight, around the bend,
Lumbered toward them —
A volcano roaring, about to blow —
Before it finally exploded into focus,

Cinders swimming up, from the roadbed,
Black smoke blasting from exhaust stacks,
Banshee-screeching brake shoes scraping drums,
Axles, lacking grease, sparking,
Frames of oversize transport carriers
Swaying too far, side to side.

Concluding “Watching for Trains,” I sensed, knew, that Janie and I would be lovers. The last two lines of the poem suggest this: “They entered each other’s eyes, / To watch for trains just around the bend.”

Christmas 1989 came, and Jan took Trilogly and Troika to her parents’ home, in Jacksonville, Illinois; I was left to fend for myself. Janie invited me to share Christmas with her and her two boys. I accepted and slept over at her house, torn between a sense of gratefulness, for having someone to be with, and of guilt, for being separated from my family. But by that time, Jan and I weren’t even pretending that we shared a marriage.

In early January 1990, I met Janie, clandestinely, in New York. I booked a room in the decrepit St. Moritz Hotel; she stayed just a few doors down, on Central Park South, at the prestigious Park Lane Hotel. Though I soon moved in with her, I kept my room because I was still married and concerned that it might cause me to lose further ground, in the senseless, egregiously expensive process of the dissolution of my marriage.

And how ironic it was that I should be staying with Janie, within a half-minute’s walk from where my dad and I used to stay, forty years prior, at the Savoy-Plaza Hotel, which was razed in 1964. Doubly ironic was the fact that FAO Schwarz (where I would go, as a boy, to escape into its world of electric trains) was now located where the old Savoy-Plaza stood, on the ground floor of the GM building, just across the street. The opportunity to share, with Jane, this part of Manhattan, which had always been so magical to me, was, itself, especially enchanting.

Never had I lost myself to such a romantic fugue. Somehow, in that brief winter interlude, Janie and I felt it was both now and forever. During those few days in New York City, we gave ourselves to each other. At some point, it began to snow, and the snow blessed us. My poem

for her, “New York Snowstorm” (03404, 1/10/90 — [2]), records the epiphany of our ardor:

...the touching

Was such a magical passage to lovemaking
That eventually came and kept coming, coming,
Later and later, until only the snow
Knew when our reflections in the sweating glass
Quit witnessing its mystical visitation.

In early February, I left St. Louis, for a ten-day retreat to my parents’ oceanfront condominium, in Fort Lauderdale. The chaos and humiliation of my separation from Jan was still suffusing me with anguish. I needed to be by myself, away from my hometown, and have some peace in which to get my thoughts in order. I wrote fourteen poems during that lonely trip, two for Janie, two others about my crumbling relationship with Jan. Those ten days felt like ten years.

I returned, to St. Louis, on a Friday. Sunday afternoon, three Clayton police officers arrived at our front door. While I was in Florida, the machinery had been put in motion to have me evicted from the house. My children watched as the policemen escorted me out. I was too stunned to be outraged, embarrassed, or crushed. The next morning, having spent my first night in my new “home” — a room at the Breckenridge Hotel, within walking distance of my writing office — I wrote “Restraining Order Enforced” (03625, 2/12/90).

For the rest of that year, my children never saw me. I anguished over not being part of their lives, especially during their formative, vulnerable preteen and teenage years, when their personalities were maturing. Sadly, they had no dad to listen to their predicaments, help them make decisions and resolve their problems, no dad to pitch in with their homework, no dad with whom to watch TV and videos and just be silly. Instead, I was exiled in a hotel room, by night, my writing office, by day. They were at the mercy of the divorce’s inner workings.

In that stark hotel room, where I lived for almost a year, when I’d get in bed at night, I’d picture Trilogy and Troika in their beds in that large house, on Hillvale, in Clayton, and wanted to believe that they were picturing me, too, in my hotel quarters. Then, I’d envision them in their beds in our home in Farmington (with me reading Dr. Seuss to them, singing lullabies) — my two little charges growing up with Jan and me, and as I’d fade beneath the weight of my tears, I’d lose sight of them as they were plucked up in the beak of a colossal vulture and carried off, along a horizon lit by a bleeding sun, to a distant sky beyond my reckoning. This recurring nightmare ravaged my fragile psyche, for more than a year.

My eviction from home defined the real end of my marriage to Jan, even though our divorce didn’t become official until October 1990. To quell the loneliness and pain, I began spending more and more time with Janie. Between February and October, as proceedings wended interminably through the courts, we twice visited Chicago and once more met in Manhattan. In St. Louis, we went to the circus and symphony, again

and again; we visited the art museum, returned to the levee, to view Eads Bridge and the trains; we saw a baseball game, went back to Busch's Grove, on August 10, to celebrate the anniversary of our first date.

Upon returning from our first trip to New York together, Janie asked if she could help me with anything at Timeless Press. I told her that Linda Hermelin was about to leave for a permanent job. I asked Janie if she would finish the last task for *William Faulkner, Life Glimpses*: putting together the index. For three straight weeks, she buried herself in three-by-five note cards — a true labor of love.

Janie would soon prove to be the catalyst, the guiding force, for my publishing company. In 1990, she would become its first editor in chief. In 1991, Time Being Books (the new name of Timeless Press, for purposes of incorporation) would publish the book I'd written and dedicated to Jane: *Forever, for Now: Poems for a Later Love*. Besides being a paean to her, it would implicitly express my gratitude to her, for assuming the responsibilities of overseeing and advancing my ambitious press.

Unlike me, Jane was a realist, a practical thinker, not a poet or dreamer. After asking me how long I thought I would need her help (I honestly figured it would take about three and a half hours of intense work, on her part, to get things off the ground), she assessed the real, long-term requirements of a small press: two full-time, strictly disciplined editors — nothing less.

In March 1990, Jane received a résumé from Sheri Cornell (Vander-molen), a young lady with one semester to go before graduating, with a degree in English education, from the University of Missouri. She was seeking summer work. Janie was so impressed with her academic record, she insisted that although Timeless Press didn't have any cash flow — didn't have a budget for one employee, let alone two — it couldn't afford not to hire this extraordinarily promising applicant. Jane called Sheri and offered her a job. She'd start work at the end of May and stay until the end of August, when she'd return to school, to conclude her final semester.

In April 1990, following up on an unusual situation-wanted ad in the Sunday *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Jane contacted Jerry Call, an interesting young man with bachelor's and master's degrees in English, from the University of Missouri, and work experience ranging from teaching at colleges and a yeshiva, to proofreading aircraft-maintenance manuals for McDonnell Douglas (now Boeing), to working as a management consultant at the Chicago Board of Trade. Janie was certain that his qualifications were just what Timeless Press needed. Two days later, Jerry had an office right across from the one reserved for Sheri.

Suddenly, with divorce imminent, I threw myself into a wholly new career, as a publisher of poetry. There I was, now moved across the hall, into larger offices at Le Chateau Village, with two vibrantly intelligent and energetic people working at my side, one twenty years my junior, the other almost thirty years younger. The stage was set.

Finally, the fated eleventh day of October came, when Jan and I went to the Clayton courthouse, to officially conclude the marriage we'd sealed two decades earlier, in San Francisco's Sutro Park, high above the Pacific

Ocean, on that silent, humid, flowering morning of July 8, 1970 — two decades come and gone, as if in an instant as well as an endlessly protracted agony.

On that solemn occasion, in that anonymous courtroom, Jan handed me a bouquet of roses. In turn, I gave her a poem I'd composed, to memorialize the event: "The First Frost" (03645, 10/11/90). It expressed my deep dismay and regret, my colossal sorrow, my helplessness, my resignation to our fate. It captured my hope that, for all the destructiveness we'd inflicted upon each other and despite our straying, our separation, we might never forget that love was our original guiding light.

For us, separated from each other irretrievably,
 This day marks the first frost of our middle ages
 And our gothic years.
 If it must be symbolic of all we've lost,
 At least let me see, in its mica-white glistening,
 Some sign of redemption,
 That our shattered heart-parts
 Might not be scattered with this day's dust,
 Dissipated mist lifting into twilight,
 To mix with ice crystals
 Drifting down, down into the abyss.

O God, let love sustain us, in days to come,
 Just as my tears, wetting this page,
 With this final benediction for you, my wife,
 Make me realize that even in my silences,
 I'll always be grieving for us.
 And if my tears turn to frost
 Spreading across the lawn of our remaining years,
 Let the heated love we shared
 Turn it into pacific water,
 On which we might walk, the rest of our lives,
 And thaw our frozen souls.

But the roses and the poem only heightened the pain of the formal severing of our wedding vows. It almost seemed as if our divorce didn't relate to us, wasn't meant for us, that it was all a vast mistake, some other couple's unceremonious demise.

And yet, in a flash, its finality was reality. We were no more, as if our entire history had never existed. In that impersonal courthouse, neither Jan nor I fully comprehended the gravity of that which we had willed into permanent closure.

Louis Daniel Brodsky
 5/30–6/20/01
 St. Louis, Missouri