

## Poetry Archive: Part II

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### Section 3: Third Time's a Charm (2001-2002)

*While there's life, there's hope. - Cicero (106 BC – 43 BC), Ad Atticum*

After Dinah and I were finished, in the summer of 2001, I was fortunate enough to be cast in the Beothuck Street Players' production of *Evita* at the Arts and Culture Centre in St. John's. Damhnait Doyle was playing the lead, and I was honoured to be in the supporting role of the colourful tango singer, Magaldi. I discuss this in more depth in the special events section of "Tunes", but I bring it up here because it led to a paid position performing in five shows in the Stephenville Theatre Festival the following summer.

It was there I would meet my third wife, Tina – a woman like no woman I had ever known, who helped me turn the corner on my life. If finding my literary voice was the turning point in my life as a writer, Tina was the turning point in my life as a man. But before Tina, even before Stephenville, another promising romantic avenue would turn into a heartbreaking dead end.

Not long after we finished the run of *Evita*, an old friend got in touch with me. Hearing from Deidre (name changed) came straight out of a clear blue sky. We had met seventeen years before, and I was married to my first wife at the time. My faithfulness to my wife, and Deidre's own personal ethic, meant at that time we could only smile and feel electricity around one another. I hadn't had contact with her for twelve years, and now she was asking me out on a date.

I was eager to take my mind off Dinah and get on with my life, so I accepted, not knowing yet about Tina and Stephenville. Entertaining the fondest memories of how Deidre and I felt about each other all those years ago, I was looking forward to dining with her. It wasn't long before we found out why we were smiling at each other so much back then, and I wrote:

#### Twelve Year Itch

*I have been itching,  
itching to see You again,*

*for twelve years.  
I have spent twelve years  
finding out why  
I have been itching for twelve years.*

*It seems  
I have been in training  
with others, for You.  
Learning,  
sharpening romantic tools,  
maturing, acquiring patience,  
getting healthy,  
getting everything out of the way,  
for You.*

*Most itches are irritating,  
something we try to be rid of.  
And most are on the skin,  
demanding to be eliminated.  
But this itch is not like that.  
It is a sweet pain, a treasured ache.  
And it is, and always has been,  
under my skin.*

*And now I dare to hope,  
and dare to believe,  
that You, too, have been itching.  
Life is too short, Deidre,  
to spend it itching,  
no matter how exquisite the itch.  
So, what do you say?  
Let's spend the rest of our time....  
scratching!*

And this kicked off my next effort to find lasting love, a one and only. She had a fine son, and Brian (name changed) was a wonderful little seven-year-old that I came to love like he was my own.

At first, I resisted completely committing myself to her, with my recent past colouring my judgement. All the same, we got closer and closer until I could no longer deny it. My feelings for Deidre deepened in a short time, and I began to think she might

be the one who could save me from my never-ending embattled efforts to find a partner. On Christmas Eve, 2001, I told her I was committed to a life with her and her son; and on New Year's Eve I asked her to be my wife. She accepted, and before Valentine's Day I had an engagement ring on her finger. We moved into a house together, and it seemed all that was left to do was to live happily ever after.

However, incredibly, even this was doomed. As our spring wedding date approached it became hard to deny we didn't feel the same way about it. I became anxious, and with a three-month stint at in Stephenville looming I needed to have some definite idea of where our relationship was going before I left. Much to my disappointment and dismay, she was emotionally "stuck". But I couldn't very well go to Stephenville for the summer wondering about her feelings, with the likelihood that she would ultimately decline to marry me, so we had to agree to call everything off.

I left for the West Coast four days later, my heart in pieces, in a dazed funk. For the first time since coming to health, I was forced to consider the very real possibility that I am not meant to enjoy the kind of happiness marriage can provide. Diedre remains a lady that I truly loved, and another person with whom I tried to establish and maintain a relationship. But she had decided against it, or at least couldn't decide to be for it, unable to give me or anyone else (including herself) any real reason.

She, and her fine son, will always have a special place in my heart.

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Contemplating a whole new life-plan in 2002 was a daunting prospect for me, and in Stephenville I threw myself into my work to ease the pain. I worked hard for long hours, memorizing lines and stage directions, rehearsing for five different shows. But every minute of downtime was filled with sadness, loneliness and self-doubt. After about a week of this misery I wrote:

### **The Price of Admission**

*I don't know how dignified it is,  
and I don't really care,  
but I am very lonely.*

*Above all  
I prize truth, honesty, sincerity.  
This means I have to say:  
I am very lonely.*

*While it is true*

*that it would not do  
to whine about it,  
I can't help coming to the conclusion  
that the best chance of finding someone,  
to end this loneliness,  
is to say  
out loud  
to someone:  
I am very lonely.*

I must admit to being every bit as desperate as I sound in those lines.

Trying to work through the latest in a string of failed romances in my life, I was having difficulty not seeing it all as one long failure, and it was really starting to get to me. I wrote in anguish and despair:

### **Stung**

*What if you worked hard,  
To become as educated,  
skilled and productive as possible,  
under severely adverse conditions.*

*What if you worked hard  
over the course of your entire life  
to be a better person,  
and succeeded?*

*What if you worked hard  
over the course of your entire life  
to be a better man,  
and succeeded?*

*Kinder to your fellow man and woman.  
A better lover.  
A better partner.  
A better father.  
A better son.  
A better brother.  
A better friend.*

*And devoted  
to achieving  
a better  
and better life.*

*Now,  
what if nobody believed you?*

I was awfully dark at this point and feeling quite sorry for myself. My work and the new friends I met, substantial and engaging as could be, were my only solace.

Slowly but surely, I began to give myself over to a new way of life and love, and these new friends helped me with this immensely. I began to look at things differently, and I decided I would try to enjoy each day without any thought of future attachment – in self-defense.

I vowed to spend as much quality time with friends as possible, when my work permitted it. I would play it safe, simply enjoy adult fun with like-minded people, and try to make the most out of every moment spent with whomever, doing whatever. I was determined to make it work.

\* \* \*

For one of the shows in Stephenville, a production of Winnie the Pooh for the little ones, I was cast in the role of Tigger. One of my co-stars was a young woman of nineteen playing Rabbit. Her family had emigrated to Canada from the subcontinent before she was born, and I was knocked out by her exotic beauty, inside and out. She was too young for a romantic relationship with me, but in keeping with my fresh approach I decided to simply enjoy her company as much as possible, and express the kind of love that was appropriate to this situation and this particular young woman:

### **For a Rabbit**

*She is  
the loveliest of rabbits.  
A wild little creature  
I found here.*

*Innocent,  
Unspoiled by her world  
yet very much involved in her world.*

*And now mine.*

*But I am a tiger.  
A strange animal,  
unlike any ever known.  
Attracted to a rabbit.*

*She is afraid,  
For she is a rabbit  
and I am a tiger.  
I understand.  
But there is nothing to fear.  
I love rabbits.  
I protect rabbits.*

*Rabbits with long luscious locks.  
Rabbits with silky cedar skin,  
and lips and teeth  
that conspire to express  
what she thinks and feels,  
and to smile at me.*

*So nice to have found  
a most beautiful soul within,  
this Rabbit!*

\* \* \*

I did have one date during that summer on the West Coast, in spite of myself. It just happened. Her name was April. She worked at the bar I frequented, and one evening after getting a little tipsy, I asked her if she would go out with me the following night and she agreed. The next day as I showered to get ready for the date, a few poetic ideas emerged, and I scratched them down after drying off:

### **April Showers**

*April showers in my life.  
Refreshing change along my path.  
For I am parched from too much sun,*

*and feeling like the only one.*

*But now I walk in blessed rain,  
cleansed and feeling new again.  
A welcome respite from my pain.  
I am grateful.*

*April showers me with love  
in perfect dreams I dare not have.  
But for a brief and fleeting time  
I get to feel as though she's mine.*

*Last night she said so readily  
that she would rendezvous with me  
and let me have her company.  
I am waiting.*

*April showers, then she dresses,  
getting ready for the night.  
Petite and poised she'll meet me there,  
for on this evening we're a pair.*

*A wise young woman, of this I'm sure.  
I want to get to know her more,  
to wash away my cares before  
these April showers end.*

We only had the one date, but it was pleasant and thoroughly enjoyable. And it was a significant step in the adoption of my new way of life and love. A smart, lovely young lady encouraged me. Thank you, April.

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That whole summer I steeled myself against any expectations of meeting a one-and-only. I could be heard saying to my friends: "I'm not chasing love anymore. It will have to come after me, and it will have to be very convincing". A somewhat cynical and hardened version of me had emerged, a man who had given up on true love in favour of some kind of single-minded survival. And by now, I was having enough success adopting my new lifestyle to begin to believe I could actually pull it off.

Then, about two weeks before the end of my stint with the festival, I met her.

She was from a place about one hundred miles outside St. John's, visiting a friend in the area with her sister. She was quiet, unassuming, and very beautiful. She made no advances but for her potent presence, and I found myself working hard to avert my attention. But it was futile. My soul had other ideas.

Her radiant reserve was a powerful influence on me, and all my avoidance and determined solitude led me straight back to her. The next thing I knew we were parked by the beach in her car, talking, speaking freely about ourselves, our lives, and the experiences that had brought us this far. She was so easy to talk to, and the time flew by. We had talked through the night, I had rehearsal, and suddenly it was time to part. With the realities of our separate lives at home, we said our good-byes, and I honestly never expected to see her again.

But there was something we didn't know.

My trip to the West Coast was an unqualified professional success, and my return to the city was somewhat triumphant. But it was not so much the professional success. It was my overcoming my broken engagement and finding some degree of success with my new approach. I felt that I was making the adjustment, even though this new lifestyle was contrary to my true nature.

Then one afternoon in St. John's, when I walked into the bar to do the sound check for my first gig back in town that evening, she was sitting there on a barstool, looking lovely like a perfectly wrapped gift tied with a big red bow. My heart leapt over everything to greet her and the rest of me followed. It was then our hearts knew why the night we spent talking was so special, and why it felt so right to be together again.

What neither of us knew when we parted in Stephenville was how strongly she felt for me, and me for her. I was hanging on to a scrap of my determined bachelorhood, still, and she wasn't even sure why she was there. But our hearts knew, even if we didn't. Those hearts knew the way it had to be, and after that day we ached for each other whenever apart. Her name is Tina, and I am thankful every day for the wisdom and workings of our hearts back then.

Her friends and family call her Tee, and a couple of weeks later I wrote a poem to poetically capture the whirlwind month we had just come through since we met. It was another epic:

### **To A Tee**

*Dare I hope again?  
Dare I be led  
to believe yet again?*

*Of late I have been saying*

*that I will no longer chase.  
I had decided  
that it is I who is to be pursued,  
and by someone very convincing.  
It would have to be this way  
if I was ever to be a one-and only.*

*And she did pursue me,  
with a special brand of romantic reticence.  
And she was convincing.  
Not so much with her words,  
though they were well-chosen and wise,  
but with the sheer joy and peace  
that being with her gave my embattled spirit.*

*We met out west  
on neutral ground.  
She appeared out of the blue,  
finding me so into the blue  
and despairing of love.*

*She  
a perfect lady,  
preserved and pleasant.  
She  
a wonderful woman,  
careful and capable,  
with beauty that refused to yield to time,  
rather enhanced by it.*

*These qualities  
mercifully militated against my despair  
and drew me in  
to the quiet yet stimulating haven  
of her company.*

*And there I dwelled  
until soon we were  
talking and touching  
by the sea  
in the rain.*

*Touching tenderly, tentatively.  
Talking truthfully.  
Relating to each other  
with an uneasy ease,  
without artifice.*

*I told her my unfortunate past,  
and she listened  
so properly and placidly.  
Her dark green eyes cared for me  
just by looking at me.  
And as I spoke  
I felt cradled in her very heart.*

*She told me of her life.  
She spoke candidly  
of her losses and triumphs,  
speaking humbly,  
yet with a dignified air  
that held me rapt in its majesty.  
And her beauty!*

*But she was on a shelf.  
On a shelf for far too long.  
A porcelain doll wrapped in plastic.  
A flower needing water and light.  
So passionate,  
thirsting for life and love,  
under-appreciated as a woman.*

*Incomprehensible.  
And then reality regained the upper hand,  
and compelled us to part ways just after sunrise.  
She reluctantly returned to her home back east.*

*Smitten,  
I reluctantly returned to mine sometime later.  
Living miles apart,  
any further contact unlikely.  
I never expected to see her again.*

*Then,  
just a couple of weeks later,  
magically she reappeared.  
There she was,  
sitting prim and precious,  
right in the middle of my world.*

*Our hearts came together immediately,  
only now fully comprehending  
the ache that was their breach.  
We reveled in each other,  
and so began our future.*

---

*It has been little more than a month,  
but already  
it has been long enough to know  
why I will love her always.  
It is simply her.  
She is like no other.*

*She has the poise of a queen,  
the carriage of nobility,  
the daintiness of youthful femininity,  
all regal and wrapped  
in a crafted but deserved dignity.  
She is truly a lady.*

*Her smile a symphony of female features.  
Dark smoldering siren's eyes,  
a perfectly elegant nose,  
the ideal mouth,  
all captured on the face of an innocent little girl.  
She is beautiful.*

*She has the gorgeous body of a real woman.  
Her head crowns a classic figure,  
with the hands of a mother,*

*sculptured legs,  
stunningly soft, sensual skin.  
She is a very sexy woman.  
She is Woman.*

*She has her own ways and wiles,  
somehow aloof,  
unruffled and unspoiled  
by situations and circumstances  
that threaten to disturb her world.  
She has an organized and ordered mind.  
It just wouldn't do.*

*She is authentic,  
and moves about her world with a quiet confidence.  
Confidence is clad in a cultured character,  
and she plies her own self-styled etiquette with aplomb  
wherever she goes.*

*She is sensitive and romantic.  
She loves when rain and sun come to her together.  
She loves moonlight and candlelight,  
small talk and sweet nothings,  
and her passion knows no bounds when unleashed.  
She is complete.*

Determined not to look for love and a partner, I had still managed to find the most beautiful and complete woman I had ever met, much less been with. It felt a lot more like she had found me, and I liked seeing it that way. This was just how it should be, and as we now move through life together, I realize more with each passing day that it simply had to be her.

In the past it seems that, whomever I loved, I had always been enamoured of my own romanticism. For the first time in my life it is her unique brand of romanticism I am taken with. As I would write and recite in my wedding vows to her some years later, her love for me is the highest honour I have received in this life. And it is hard not to think that she also came along just in time to save me from myself.

\* \* \*

We have had to make a lot of adjustments and arrangements to be together, to which those who know us well can attest. She had to turn her world upside down to be with me. Though they now know and understand it all, almost all her friends and family withdrew from us for a time. Yet every step we took assured us of our love.

In the early going, several poems emerged to express the many ways I love her, the many ways she is lovable. Sometimes it's the things I notice as we go about our business, things like:

## Her Gypsy Feet

*She is indeed beautiful.  
Elegant. Lovely. Statuesque.  
Every inch a lady,  
from the top of her majestic head  
to her ..... her feet.  
But her feet!  
They are the feet of a gypsy.*

*My little gypsy's feet  
reveal the true character of the lady.  
I believe they betray the spirit  
of the little girl I have found  
inside this careful and dignified woman.  
They tell me who she really is.*

*Whenever possible,  
usually when she is "at home",  
she is barefoot.  
Those perfectly proud peds carry her  
daintily and deftly about her beautiful business.  
And even when she is compelled to be shod  
she prefers sandals.*

*They are strong looking,  
with personality and maturity.  
They present as that which has endured  
a lifetime of service  
to support and compliment her  
as they reveal the passionate soul of a lady ---  
the truth of her.*

*They are the most wonderful shade of light brown,  
and each toe has its own special place.*

*Sometimes,  
if her mood or circumstances call for it,  
she will paint her toenails.  
But her right ankle will always be adorned  
with a youthful little anklet.  
Her feet show her to be the gypsy she is.*

*Her little gypsy feet  
conjure up visions of a Latin teenage girl,  
or maybe an American Indian princess,  
playing barefoot in the dust.  
She dances and she skips along.  
I have looked deep into my lady,  
and I have seen this dark little dancer playing there.*

*Her little gypsy feet.  
I will kiss and caress them  
as often as I can,  
for as long as I can.  
They are who she is.*

The first few months involved a lot of waiting; waiting for her to come to me; waiting for the day when we could be together. Given my romantic history, it should not be hard to understand how difficult that was for me. It is a tribute to how special she is to me, that I waited for her, faithfully and fervently. All the same, waiting alone in my little bed sitting room involved a great deal of:

### **Separation Anxiety**

*Darkness.  
Awareness of consciousness,  
then awake.  
Eyes flicker open on the room,  
and I see that I have started another day  
without her.*

*Here in this cell  
I sit silently staring into space.  
This self-imposed, self-contained sentence ---  
to spend time here without her.  
The sweet ache of longing for her  
my only lifeline.*

*Another few days to go.  
Interminable.  
I wait with eyes that cannot see her,  
fingers that cannot touch her,  
arms that cannot hold her,  
lips that cannot kiss her,  
and this...*

*When she is not here  
everything is not her.  
Everything I do  
is instead of her.  
Oh, I have plenty to do,  
but without her  
everything is the second thing I want to do.*

*Time is agonizingly slow now,  
and with her it is fleeting.  
Damn relativity.  
It is sometimes almost unbearable  
to think only of her,  
to want only her,  
without her.*

*Finally,  
upon reflection,  
the triumphant realization,  
that the breach confirms  
and affirms  
our love and its power.*

*Even so,  
how I miss her.*

Sometimes she needed encouragement, to deal with the turmoil our efforts to be together was causing her and her family, and how a life immersed in Catholicism amplified it all. Even now I am amazed when I look back on all she had to endure and overcome to be with me, and I felt I needed to recognize this:

## Hang On

*Listen to me,  
Sweetest One.  
Please take heart.  
The road ahead is rough, I know.  
But along that road a love will grow.*

*You have been steeped,  
like millions more,  
in dogmatic despair.  
It keeps you filled with aimless guilt.  
Twixt love and life a wall is built.*

*But love is life,  
and life is love.  
You know this.  
And our love will not allow  
walls or barriers, anyhow.*

*Wear our love  
as though a badge.  
And wear it proudly.  
This trial has shown me so much, Tee.  
We'll share this love eternally.*

*I am so proud of you.*

Because she is so quiet by nature, much of the time it wasn't apparent to me that she was suffering the slings and arrows of those dead set against our being together, and once I doubted her on this. Soon I needed to apologize to her for letting it get the better of me.

## Please Forgive Me

*Please forgive me. I'm beset  
by all I haven't captured yet.*

*Missing you and wishing for  
is bad enough, and yet it's more.*

*I have to hear of all you bear,  
and I can't be beside you there.*

*My past is such I've not much more  
for waiting here outside the door.*

*But now I've gone and made it worse,  
for loving you alone's a curse.*

*In saying how I feel so bad,  
I've only gone and made you sad.*

*You think I'd rather walk away  
than stand to this another day.*

*Don't think that! I'm all alone,  
and I detest the telephone.*

*Please believe it's not about you,  
but rather those upset with you.*

*I'm helpless here to help you out.  
please don't think I have a doubt.*

*So, please forgive me. I'm beset  
by all I haven't captured yet.*

A minimalist piece succinctly and optimistically puts love while separated in perspective:

## **Either Here or There**

*She can hug me from there.  
I can touch the hair on the back of her neck from here.  
Will we ever be apart?*

I will end this section of the archive with a poem written to capture who she is all by herself and, therefore, who she is to me. I know that one poem or a dozen poems could never capture all that she is, or all that she is to me – that’s what living is for! It is our lifetime of love together which will stand as the greatest poem of all in the end. Yet the effort to encapsulate how I feel in just one poem is itself an act of love, so I continued to try:

## **Endearments**

*So many things about her endear her to me.  
So many of her ways fascinate,  
and fortify this feeling for her I have found.*

*When dining, she prefers small portions.  
She doesn’t simply eat, or even dine.  
She introduces the food to her temple.  
She is dainty and refined.*

*She possesses a pure and playful sophistication.  
Her culture and class shine through.  
She is not haughty, though people with less play the snob.  
No, her unique brand of dignity is born of genuine character.*

*Pretentious she is not. The word has no idea what she means.*

*Things in her world are special  
because she deems them special.  
For instance, negative statements and discussions  
are not permitted in her boudoir.  
She knows exactly what she likes,  
and exactly what she doesn’t like.  
She is so sensible.*

*She is ordered; ordered about ordering.  
Ready for anything and everything.  
But she needs to be ready  
to work on getting ready  
beforehand....when she's ready.  
Neat and tidy.*

*The focus of her mind  
is strangely arousing to me.  
All that feminine power and passion,  
the flood of emotion,  
the heart tempered wisdom of the woman,  
all focused and in control.  
She keeps her head when all about her...*

*She looks after herself,  
and clearly always has.  
And she takes care when she speaks,  
pronouncing every word carefully and properly.  
A special grace accompanies everything she says and does.*

*She could never be called loquacious,  
but she expresses herself eloquently.  
She measures every word,  
not one more than needs to be said,  
and with a gentle but confident voice.  
I will learn a lot.*

*If she decides something, it has been decided,  
and everyone in earshot knows it implicitly.  
You may be sure she has thought it through  
or she would have said nothing.  
And she is punctual.  
I can depend on her.*

*Each and every freckle on her body is exquisite,  
and I cherish them all.  
And when I cherish them so, she is silent,  
standing alone in the glow of the compliment,  
just like each and every one of those freckles.  
Adorable is what she is.*

*Watch this.  
When I begin to speak of her toes  
they begin to wiggle and flex.  
They will probably do so while she is reading this verse.  
She can't help it.*

*She gives me all her love,  
so readily and generously,  
when we love.  
I feel all the love she holds for me.  
It is powerful and undeniable.*

*She is all these things,  
and she has all these ways.  
She is afraid my best love poetry is behind me.  
She does not know  
it is precisely her life and love  
that ensures a life of prodigious poeticism  
in her service.*

*She inspires me.  
She always will.*

At this point, we were just getting warmed up.

\* \* \*

She remains and forevermore will be the object of my greatest love. She is the inspiration for all I have created since, far beyond the realm of poetry, beyond the realm of art. She is the caretaker of my love and life, I still love her with all my heart, and I always will.

*Jeff R. Kelland*