

## Poetry Archive: Part III

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### Section 1: Getting There From Here (2003-2005)

*'Cause she's out there somewhere  
and when I find her I will hold her,  
and together we'll rejoice.*

*Jeff R. Kelland, **Paradise Lost***

Tina and I sometimes reflect on my thinking and writing about her, even before we met. Because, as it turns out, it was Tina who was “out there somewhere” in **Paradise Lost**. I did indeed find her and hold her; and we have been finding ways to rejoice together ever since. The unfolding of our individual lives, the way they have come together, and how we have blended them over the years only verifies this. Our story inspires us still.

As usual, at any given time, my various verses will try to convey how special she is, and how special she makes me feel. But one thing should shine through more than anything else – her dignity, and the myriad ways she carries and displays it. Words I had never had the pleasure of using to describe a woman – regal, classy, aloof, poised, carriage, aplomb – these are the kind of words that come to mind when preparing to describe Tina, and express what it is about her that sets her apart.

In the end, they all fall short. Words can only approximate to the essence of the woman, just enough to damn her with faint praise, for it is ineffable. No one could compare. It's no contest. Suffice it to say that, for this man, how she is so completely and authentically put together, and so naturally so, makes her the sexiest woman I have ever met, never mind had the honour of being with. Twenty years on, on so many levels, I have never been as blessed as I have been in my life with Tina, and I don't expect this to ever change.

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In the summer of 2003, Tina and I were well on the way, reveling in each other in every way possible. This took many forms – some wild, some wicked, and all wonderful.

Once, I told her about a hidden clearing in the trees I liked to visit from time to time. It was out on the point in New Melbourne, Trinity Bay, where I used to live with my family as a young man, in a oceanfront house I helped my father build when we moved out there from St. John's in the late 70s. Though it was almost three hours out of town, Tina really wanted to see it, so we made a plan to spend a few days out around my old stompin' grounds so we could check it out. It was fantasy come true:

### **Far, a field**

*I know, and have, a field.  
It lies deep in the woods,  
off the beaten path,  
at the end of an even less beaten path.*

*Approaching  
it looks like a small clearing,  
then explodes into view.  
A pastoral haven,  
for mind and body.*

*I try to get there when I can.  
A place for me  
to be alone,  
to find peace and solitude,  
to be naturally free.*

*Of all the times I have been,  
twice I tried to take a lady,  
and twice failed.  
They didn't like what it took  
to get there.*

*A wooded trail to the path,  
then a wooded path  
that hides the path.  
But the second half of the trail  
Is immersed in muddy water.*

*The others had not the character,  
the desire,*

*nor the love for me,  
to brave standing stagnant water  
and gain the field with me.  
It simply didn't mean enough.*

*Yesterday  
I asked my Baby  
if she would like to see my field.  
She assented  
in that quiet demure way she has.*

*My heart braced itself.  
We were on a journey,  
of miles driven  
for no other reason.  
My heart was encouraged.*

*We emerged from the car,  
and in silence  
set out on foot  
and achieved the trail.  
I didn't tell her about the water...*

*...until,  
around a bend,  
it revealed itself,  
as far up the trail as we could see  
and beyond.*

*She did not flinch.  
My heart's anticipation grew apace  
as she introduced  
those gypsy feet  
to the dark slimy-brown water.*

*She dropped her sunglasses,  
retrieved them without a word,  
and followed me,  
pressing on just behind  
in silence, in radiant beauty.*

*Without the slightest complaint,  
she waded elegantly  
through a mired messy trail until,  
scratched by branches trying to discourage us,  
we once again trod dry ground.*

*Now my heart,  
scouting the way ahead,  
had rushed on even farther,  
and already lay waiting for us  
in my field.*

*Now on a wooded path,  
hiking a little faster  
we came to the place where,  
just off to the left,  
the path inconspicuously began.*

*We broke onto it,  
and I was almost running  
when first I saw my field  
with her.  
My heart afire.*

*She walked into it  
like a débutante at a cotillion,  
like a queen making her entrance at a ball.  
And Nature welcomed her there,  
as did I.*

*My heart and I  
feverishly spread the blanket,  
and my Baby and I spent  
a heavenly mid-afternoon  
in my field together  
under a glorious sun.*

*We had already found  
peace and solitude together,  
experienced natural freedom as one.  
And now,*

*far  
a field.  
We are in love.*

As I put this poem into the archive, it occurs that this is exactly what she has been doing and continues to do for me, as we make a future together. She softly and quietly follows and accompanies me through the stale waters left by the rain and wind in my stormy past, and on to the peace I find in my life with her.

\* \* \*

Inevitably, Tina read all the poetry written before we met, and she already knew the story of my rocky road, littered with relationships that failed for want of enough love, health, or good fortune. We have no secrets. However, after reading them she seemed a bit pensive. It was early in our story, and I had yet to ply my poeticism much in the service of our love, occupied as I was with the excitement and the newness of “us”, and all the activities that entails. She wondered aloud how I would write more good poetry during my life with her, after all I had written with others before we met.

A fair question, I suppose. But that never occurred to me. I knew creativity has not a finite supply; and I had heights I had yet to attain. Even so, I appreciated where she was coming from, and I thought a poem might be the best way to allay her concerns about...well, my poetry:

### **In Defense of the Craft**

*A poem is just a set of words  
put down to help express.  
I know they've all been used before.  
To this I must confess.*

*But you love me with lips and eyes  
you've used to love before.  
Surely you don't mean to say  
that they can't love me more.*

*Your lips and eyes are not the point,  
delightful though they be.  
The depth of love inside your heart  
is what matters most to me.*

*So, when I write a poem for you  
remember this one first.  
'Cause whatever love was like before,  
with you it's unrehearsed.*

She appreciated it, but I wasn't satisfied. It was a little too Hallmark for my liking. And I needed her to know that whatever is old, for either of us, this was totally new.

So, the next day I came at it from another angle:

### **Discovery**

*For the first time in my life  
"I love you."  
Says only a fraction  
of how I feel.*

*For the first time in her life  
I am here.*

*It is the first time  
in our life.*

And I wasn't finished with it yet. I also felt the need to demonstrate how her uniqueness makes each poem I write for her unique, necessarily; and remind her that they are directed at her personally:

### **Ubiquitous**

*They are everywhere.  
You can't always see them,  
but they are there.*

*In some places many gather.  
In others just a few.  
But they are everywhere.*

*They are found in odd places.  
Secret places.  
Some always seen.  
Some never.  
Well,  
almost never.*

*Me?  
I see them as more  
than everywhere.  
They are everything.  
They are Beauty itself.*

*They arouse me,  
stare back at me  
if I am close  
and gazing into them,  
as I cherish  
her freckles.*

And there are still other ways to get this across:

### **In Love**

*I approach the house.  
The light is on over the door.*

*Inside,  
I go to the office.  
The computer desk is strewn with business forms.*

*In the kitchen  
a new scented candle burns.*

*In the bathroom,  
in the cabinet,  
linens are rearranged.*

*In the living room*

*a travel magazine on the sofa,  
open on a villa spread.*

*And  
in the bedroom,  
the window open,  
and a gentle breeze plays  
with her lace curtains.*

*My heart warms,  
amazed by how moved I am  
when I discover  
something she did  
when I wasn't there.*

It was starting to feel like I was getting through, assuaging her doubts and worries about the “originality” of our duet and my poetry about it, my argument being largely based on how original a woman she was. This spate of poetry finished with an offering reminiscent of the great e.e. cummings. She found it one morning beside her coffee:

## **Metamorphosis**

*At first,  
it's almost imperceptible.  
Where once was perfect stillness,  
Now  
a suggestion of life.*

*The cocoon doesn't move...  
and now it does.  
I think it did.  
Yes, it did move!*

*Ever so slowly  
an opening  
to the outside world  
almost insinuated.  
To the outside world  
no emergence visible.*

*It would be easier  
to see a clock's hour hand move.*

*It may as well take forever.*

*Pain  
fully  
slow,  
re  
luc  
tant  
ly,  
pushing  
the covering  
away,  
climbing out  
to begin  
anew.*

*A more beautiful creature  
I have never witnessed.  
My lady,  
slowly making  
to another day.*

\* \* \*

Just before Tina and I met, my father was diagnosed with ALS. By the time she had a chance to meet him, he was set up with a hospital bed in the living room of the apartment my parents were renting from my sister, soon to be transferred to an acute care facility for the final palliative stage.

Soon after he was moved to a private room in Hoyles Home in St. John's, it was time for me, as the oldest child, to sit with him and go over his advance directive – essentially, what does he wish to have happen when only the machines are keeping him alive. At this stage of the deterioration he could only ingest liquids, and his ability to express himself in speech was severely limited. With all the conversations he and I had engaged in over the years, at the very end it seemed that I was the only person who could understand what he was saying.

The heroic strength of character and integrity I would see and be humbled by in the minutes leading up to his passing was present when I sat at his bedside to go over the directive. True to form, my father used this necessarily profound and painful

exchange between us to teach me yet another lesson about life. When I asked him the central question about whether to pull the plug, he made me repeat it three times, then silently mouthed the words: “Do you know what you are asking me?”

I said ‘yes’, but he required a more conscious mindful affirmation, and I immediately understood. Standing, I looked straight into his weary eyes and said: “I do know what I am asking you, Dad. This is my duty as your son, and I need you to give me your answer...so they will know...when the time comes.”

Closing his eyes, he lay his head back on the pillow and his lips said: “Let go.”

Then came the day we all got the call – it was time for the family to gather at his bedside to say good-bye. I have searched, believe me, and I can find nothing redeemable in such a cruel way to die, only supreme injustice, especially after living an exemplary life that any God would approve of. His mind was perfectly preserved to the end, as his body and its systems gradually shut down. When the final seconds were upon him, my father’s shoulders came up off the bed, his face turned up, his eyes fixed on the ceiling. But I knew he wasn’t seeing the ceiling. I saw him look searchingly and willingly into “the light”, his courageous soul trying to comprehend what he was experiencing. A split second before the end there was perfect understanding, then the peace he had wanted all his life, and he was gone.

They say you don’t become a man until your father dies, and I know now what they mean. I sang one of his favourite songs at his funeral and delivered the eulogy I wrote for him, but it wasn’t enough. I needed to make peace with his life, and the manner of his death, privately:

## Missing Him

*My father,  
My sisters’ father,  
my mother’s lover,  
my very best friend.*

*The man who’s wisdom and humility  
informs my every day,  
my every hour,  
my every conversation,  
my every second of appreciation for the nature of things.*

*His perfect example bequeaths to me  
the most wonderful set of resources  
for facing life,  
and now death.*

*He taught me about respecting a woman,  
and all I know of love.*

*Whenever I listen to a song,  
any song,  
we listen together  
still,  
as always.*

*No one taught me more  
about treasuring people for who they are  
and who they can be.  
And you stood steadfastly by me,  
when I was merely potential,  
dying on the vine.*

*I so miss you,  
and wish you could share  
my hard-fought, long-awaited actuality with me.  
For it is yours  
as much as it is mine.*

*Always positive,  
when all others could only  
be negative with me.  
Dependable.  
Gentle rock.  
My father.*

What I could not know then in my grief, was that he would remain my best friend for the rest of my life.

Though I cannot be with him physically, I feel him with me always. I can pose any question in my mind and immediately know what he would say to me as his advice. His counsel and his fatherhood outlive him still, transcending his life and death, guiding me forward. Such was the greatness of my father.

\* \* \*

As time passed and we started settling in for the rest of our lives together, my heart and mind were free to turn more of my attention on the world. Since before I

wrote my first poem, I was writing essays and editorializing about whatever struck me as needing to be addressed at any given time. As with my poetry, these increased in frequency and quality from the point I came to health in 2000. Some editorials were published in the paper, many more written and filed away...until now (see Essays Archive).

Early in 2005, my thinking on current affairs and the news of the world was evolving more rapidly than ever before, paralleling what I saw as a slow and steady decline in level of human civilization and the health of the planet. My writing turned to engage what was happening, so there was less time for poetry. Nevertheless, sometimes only a poem will do.

I was feeling some of the same cynicism as I did when writing **Awakenings**, but now it was more venomous. Admittedly, the consequences for me and what I had to offer the world got a fair bit of treatment too, as there was no way to envision what the Internet, independent publishing, social media, and having one's own website could do for an artist like me in 2020. I was feeling more and more like a voice in the wilderness, whose greatest fear was to never be heard, never to be permitted to contribute in the living years, and no guarantee of it happening posthumously. In any event, I thought it was time to up the ante, to match what I was observing in humanity of late, and where it might be going:

## Waking Up

*Okay.  
So that's the way it's going to be.  
Fine.  
I didn't want to believe it.  
I will just have to make an adjustment.  
I will have to adjust a few things  
– a few very fundamental things.*

*You see,  
all my life I have believed in people.  
And I am a 'people'  
who was taught to work hard,  
be honest,  
love my neighbour,  
love life.  
But what I must accept now?*

*This changes everything.*

*I will continue to work hard,  
maybe harder than ever.  
I will still be honest,  
but a crueller honesty.  
I will still love my neighbour,  
but it won't be quite so apparent  
or self-effacing.*

*And I will still love life,  
with a more mature love;  
one which,  
of necessity,  
puts integrity and self-respect first.*

*I have graduated  
to a higher level of survival.*

*Why?  
I have worked harder  
and harder  
to be better  
in a world that cares less  
and less  
about what I have to offer,  
what I say,  
what I do.  
A bitter pill.*

*Society,  
my peers,  
the so-called civilized world,  
they have  
all turned away.  
Turned backs on the important.  
Honesty traded for political correctness,  
industry obliterated by Industry,  
purpose and meaning  
lost in a morass of me-thought.*

*What is right is forgotten*

*in the questionable quest  
for rights,  
as talent is passed over  
in favour of...  
in favour of...*

*Wait a minute!  
What exactly is it "we" want now anyway?  
And, of course,  
this is precisely the problem.*

*I have transcended anger.  
I am bitter. Sure.  
Bitter about how all this affects me.  
But not FOR me.  
For a thoughtful contribution  
wasted.*

*A great deal of effort  
into a great deal  
for many years.  
Producing,  
may I be so bold to say,  
significant results.  
And still  
I am kept  
on the outside of the cliques.  
So, yes,  
I am bitter.*

*If only the problem ended  
with my own private hell.  
No,  
my hell  
only scratches the surface.  
It is indicative  
of a greater, more pervasive evil.  
More insidious and nefarious  
than ever before.*

*It goes by many names.*

*Apathy.*  
*Indifference.*  
*Complacency.*  
*Short-sightedness.*  
*Avarice.*  
*Stupidity.*

*It is not the aggressors,*  
*for they are identifiable*  
*and predictable.*  
*Beware of the quiet evils*  
*bringing us down*  
*every day.*

*Words just indicate*  
*reality.*  
*They are born*  
*of life itself.*  
*Mere signposts*  
*to a greater truth.*  
*Religion is fading,*  
*as it should.*  
*But we are left wanting*  
*for spirituality.*

*The doctor's dedication*  
*gone the way of the house call.*  
*Art struggles*  
*while science flourishes.*  
*Inspiration surrenders*  
*to technology.*  
*And yesterday's fight*  
*against the establishment*  
*has given way to today's efforts*  
*to feel nothing.*

*We are drifting.*  
*I can feel it.*  
*But I have not given up.*  
*Not by a long shot.*  
*I have just readjusted my sights.*

*A significant readjustment.*

*I will survive this,  
and I plan to take  
a few people with me.  
Only now  
it is time to employ  
a more poisoned pen.  
Fundamental change is needed.  
For far too long  
we have been saying:  
“We have met the enemy...and he is us.”  
It is time  
the battle was joined.*

*Who will help me with this?  
She will.*

And, of course, she still is.

\* \* \*

One person I got to know since hooking up with Tina stands out from them all, and she still does. Tina's daughter, Maria, was only nine years old when we first joined; and though she didn't have to, from the outset she treated me like gold. In the interim, watching her grow up, and helping her with it when I could, I came to learn that she is very fair-minded, an incredibly gentle soul, and she's brilliant. She might just be the nicest person I have ever met.

After Tina and I were together for a couple of years, poetically expressing how I felt about Maria and her pleasant treatment of me was overdue:

### **Lovely Little Lady**

*Lovely little lady,  
they call you 'M',  
you sparkle as a precious gem.  
I only see you now and then.*

*Still I know*

*that time will tell  
that I'll be captured by your spell,  
and I will get to know you well.*

*In recent months  
it's been a ride.  
Your little world has opened wide,  
and love for life you cannot hide.*

*Pretty, smart,  
and cheerful too.  
And like your Mom, your heart is true.  
I'm really quite amazed by you.*

*I look forward  
to times ahead,  
having fun and breaking bread,  
and talking of the books you've read.*

*Lovely little lady,  
once again,  
'M' is nice, but all the same,  
I think Maria is a beautiful name.*

Since then, Maria has become an amazing young woman with a natural beauty rarely found in today's superficial world. She is an engineer, and she has the world by the tail. Anyone who knows her will tell you how very decent, loyal, caring, and sweet she is to everyone in her life, and genuinely so. She knocks me out with her loveliness and authenticity.

And she is brilliant... Did I mention how brilliant she is?

*Jeff R. Kelland*