

BRAINSTORMS, BUBBLE BATH, AND BODY COUNTS

by

Shelly Lynn Childers, B.A.

**Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of
The University of Houston Clear Lake
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

The University of Houston Clear Lake

July, 2002

**Copyright 2002, Shelly Lynn Childers
All Rights Reserved**

BRAINSTORMS, BUBBLE BATH, AND BODY COUNTS

By

Shelly Lynn Childers

APPROVED BY



John T. Gorman M.A., Ph.D., Chair



Gretchen Mieszkowski M.A., Ph.D., Committee Member



Howard C. Eisner B.A., Ph.D., Associate Dean



Emily Sutter, Ph.D., Interim Dean

ABSTRACT

BRAINSTORMS, BUBBLE BATH, AND BODY COUNTS

**Shelly Lynn Childers, M.A.
The University of Houston Clear Lake, 1996**

Thesis Chair: John T. Gorman

This thesis is a collection of poetry chosen to reveal the solitude of reflection and the connections that keep us anchored to family, the world around us, and to the act of creating.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction	1
II.	On Writing	3
	Unspoken	4
	Brainstorm	5
	Poem	6
	Wrong Turns	7
	“I Touch the Future / I Teach”	8
	On Writing an Essay	9
	Dear Mrs. Sandel,	10
	Brothers	11
	Listen	12
	Questioning Inspiration	13
	Wild Thing	14
III.	On Relationships	15
	Wet Paint	16
	Rhythms	17
	Unraveling	18
	Portraits in Triplicate	19
	Balancing Act	20
	Parenting Rules	21
	Two	22
	“Now We Wait”	23
	Wednesday Lunch	24
	Aluminum Walker	25
IV.	On Response	26
	The Good Mother	27
	House of God	28
	Living Water	29
	Tamilnadu	30
	Ground Zero	31
	Nine One One	32
	Frog Kisses	33
	Dizzyland	34
	The Five-and-Dime	35
	Final Four selection	36 37

	Multiple Instances	38
V.	On Reflection	39
	Life Giver	40
	I'm Passionate	41
	Aftertaste	42
	After An Argument	43
	Windsong	44
	Bubble Bath	45
	Summer Camp	46
	Fiasco?	47
	Tag! You're It	48
	Psssst...She Said	49
	Doll Baby	50
	Loose Ends	51

Introduction

Poetry is a fairly new form of expression for me though I have been writing for years. Previously, I confined my efforts to journal entries, literary papers, lesson plans, and presentations, but the introduction of poetry in my Master's courses intrigued and inspired me. Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, and Jane Kenyon have taught me to love the sounds of poetry and the power of language. I admire a poet's ability to capture emotion in very few words, and I especially like simple language that paints a picture for the reader. I have seen students transformed by poems that speak to them specifically, and I have watched their initial attempts at replication become an original voice. The power of poetry is not in the emotion, or the word choice, or the rhyme, but in the human response to situations and events and people that surround us. Poetry uniquely draws us toward reflection and forces us to take a second glance in our hectic, fast-paced lives.

My writing has grown from my initial attempts, and as my writing has changed, I have noticed several patterns. My signature seems to be the use of alliteration. Of all the literary devices available to me, this one occurs most often in my poetry without conscious effort. Another pattern exists in the topics I choose. If I had to categorize the poetry that I write, I would divide the pieces into four areas: writing, responses, relationships, and reflection. See, alliteration again; it just happens.

I often write about writing. I am a public school teacher of Language Arts, which means that I teach both reading and writing skills. The relationship between the two is a concept that intrigues me, as does the actual process of writing. While trying to convey the basic mechanics of writing, as well as a love for the craft, I find my own writing returning constantly to the written word, the classroom, and the language of writing.

Optimism, cynicism, joy, and frustration are evident as I write about the constraints and freedom in writing.

Other pieces of poetry pour out of me in response to situations, people, moods, and emotions. Poetry has become an outlet for my response to the world around me, when I am able to deal with the moment and especially when I am not. More often than not, my response journal becomes a poetry journal, and I don't realize the impact of situations until I read my own words.

Most of my writing deals with relationships. I write about my family, my husband, my children, my friends, and my grandparents, often returning to the same relationships over and over. My grandmother appears in my writing often, reminding me of the special relationship that we have, and the need to cherish every moment. The complexity of the many people who impact our lives never ceases to delight and amaze me.

Poetry is reflective writing. The cadence and rhythm of poetry reflect the pulse of a heartbeat and the imagery mirrors the heart of the artist. My poetry teaches me about myself, my thoughts, my dreams, and my fears. I recognize, in my poetry, parts of myself that I keep concealed most of the time. Without true reflection on myself as a writer, a mother, a wife, and a teacher, my words will ring with hollow dissonance. This may be the most important part of my writing, but it is often the most difficult.

I hope that my thesis will reflect the love that I have for literature as well as my growth as a writer. Writing, responses, relationships, and reflection form the basis for this project, which will successfully complete my Master's program, and prepare me for publication in the future.

On Writing

Unspoken

I am my words
even when no ears will hear,
conversations
march endlessly through
my cluttered mind.

Resounding, repeating, resonant,
their unanswered cadence off,
their ranks thinning
until

Echoes waver in the cavernous emptiness
and f

a

l

l

Finally into silent heaps,

just
words.

Brainstorm

Storm clouds gathering in the
 darkened sky excited her.
 Thunder, grumbling in a chorus of groans,
 called her into the heavy air.
 Books set aside, she listened for the
 voice of the storm, whisper soft,
 shrilling terror, whooshing comfort,
 hammer-strokes – an all out brawl.
 As the wind whipped at her clothes and
 bathed her face, she smiled,
 a smile sparked with laughter
 alive with the possibilities of
 power transformed.

As wind wound its way within
 the storm – lifted and shifted
 strands of thought
 clicked.

Ideas burst through barriers
 like driving rain,
 flooding her mind with echoes,
 unknown
 all but unknowable,
 hinting at possibilities,
 skirting the edges of disaster,
 slamming dragons into daycare
 and snapping lesson plans in half--
 certainties propped broken and twisted
 near a dancer stretching for her kicks,
 boxing gloves, Coca-Colas and lace doilies,
 jumbled connections in a jagged synapsc
 lifted by the storm, miraculously,
 only to be revealed
 later

in a poem.

Poem

**My words breathing in and out, living
life on paper, yet beyond
spoken, they soar and swirl above
my head, creating an energy field
crackling and spitting like a raging fire**

or

**they fall flat, lifeless and gasping
a limp white fish
bulging eyes fixed and staring as
life slowly escapes.**

**My words cocoon
in my mind resisting even
my pen as they bubble and simmer,
appear and disappear, percolating ideas and then**

only then

**they appear on the page
seeking shape, reaching for rhythm,
faintly heard, creating meaning
and mystery.**

Wrong Turns

Two roads diverged?
I can't be sure, but
veering off the path, I
found myself lost in a dense wood
wishing for a good book.

Wandering,
I found a field of weeds
flowering,
twisted stems jutting at crazy angles,
a palette of celebration.

The fragrant blooms intoxicate
me until, reeling and spilling
I stagger, laughing
at the notion of perfection.
Is my love like a red, red rose?

Bathing in that perfect slant of light
I find the glare momentarily
blinds me so I hide my eyes
and sigh, leaning slightly
in the only direction life allows.

Always trying to make
a Wrong Turn –
Right.

"I Touch the Future / I Teach"

-from a bumper sticker

**Blank stares pin me to the chalkboard,
a golden Monarch
stretched on black velvet,
flutters long since ceased
lifting flights suspended.**

**I wait, echoes of possible answers
bouncing around
my network of mental branches,
dancing gaily through my neural forest,
lighting impulse after impulse
making it *physically impossible* to stand still.**

**As I wait, the stares become frantic,
the class nervous, anxious to move on
in the rush toward work,
toward composition,
toward an assignment.
God, *just tell us what to do!***

**I wait and finally I see it.
An inspiration,
maybe *THE* question.
An original thought,
an epic idea formulated
*right before my eyes.***

**I nod toward this courageous upraised hand,
a young Gilgamesh beginning his journey,
a sculptor shaping his masterpiece,
only to hear,**

"But, what was the question?"

and

I wait.

On Writing an Essay

**My students write
to fill the lines
“like, you know, well
'cause the teacher said.”**

chaotic snips of thirteen.

**My words languish lazily
on scraps and notes
and envelopes
fragments framed in
half-uttered thoughts.**

**Perhaps I'll follow their
naïve lead as
I struggle valiantly
to get it down,
just the right nuance.**

“like, well, you know”

Dear Mrs. Sandel,

Do you remember me? Quiet, shy, a front row student, legs swinging freely, barely scraping the floor in a desk too large, Big Chief tablet neatly placed, fat pencils perfectly positioned in grooved spaces – I couldn't wait to write with a real pencil, a yellow pencil, pink tipped, erasered, hands crossed quietly in my plaid-skirted lap – waiting patiently for the bell, the pledge, the Bible Verse of the Day. Your soft-spoken manner demanded respect, our manners constantly under scrutiny – milk money clutched in sweaty hands, nickels collected by your Best Helper, waiting our turn to read Dick and Jane, waiting in turn for recess—I wonder –

Would you be appalled by school bombings, children with guns, murder, terror, tension in classrooms today – first grade shooters, high school shooters, always shooters. I in my turn, teach in a new century – money buys taco chips, slushees, pizza, or drugs. Would you be afraid to go to school? What about the fear of these children? Counseling services on campus, offered freely to comfort nervous learners. How would you handle threatening letters? Would you be frozen, unable to function in a techno class with Internet connections, e-mail attendance, high stakes mandated testing? And what of respect that I learned from you? Will they learn it from me? The prayers that flowed so sweetly from your lips are no longer allowed; we say the pledge at occasional assemblies.... Video game mania and instant information suggest brighter students with unlimited possibilities. Would you agree?

Forever a student,

Brothers

People say, it's not the same
 kids are so different, we've got to change.
 divided families, custody disputes,
 MTV and video games,
 hot new rap that flips their lids,
 debating sex.
 Are they still "just kids?"

JUVENILE CHARGED WITH MURDER

I predict the circumstances
 before I recognize the unnamed boys.
 The apartments where they lived, the stepfather
 threatening them, hitting them, beating their mother...
 Then my agony at reading on, and knowing
 that the twin who jumped between
 his silent brother and the battering
 fists of a grown man
 was the same face I'd coaxed to a smile
 as he struggled to write a paper –
 a paper persuading an unknown person
 to solve problems
 that didn't really matter,
 when the problems at home had no solution
 and his brother sat silent.
 Am I teaching them what they need to know?

I hear them say it's not the same,
 kids are different, we've got to change.
 TEKS and TAAS, and Columbine,
 standardized dress and ID lines.

Kids are changing;
 There have to be poems.

Listen

Some poems aren't written
 they are spoken
 but often I refuse to listen
 only to be taught by a child.

Alex, a gentle giant, damaged beyond repair,
 the mind of a child forever lost
 in his growing body, asking hesitantly,
 "What does it mean to die?
 When will he be home?"
 My halting reply,
 "He is home."

Alex, confused hurting,
 ideas spinning in an autistic fog
 needing to write a eulogy,
 a letter,
 needing to retrieve words,
 escaping through dark tunnels in his mind.
 needing to say goodbye to Dad,
 his champion, his support, his words.

Together we composed
 put down on paper,
 his words,
 poetry to be read at a funeral
 but the words we didn't write
 taunt me, haunt me even
 as his stammering pleas fill the church
 with living poetry.

"Tell my Dad it's OK.
 I know why he left.
 Tell him it's OK."

Questioning Inspiration

**Can my poems find me
lost and alone,
even when I know
just where I am?**

**What if calling
myself a poet seems
out of line?**

**Why does the struggle to know what to say,
and to say what I mean,
make writing so hard?**

**Does the intensity
fatigue me
or simply create a pitch,
an emotion I rise to?**

**Will the spiritual dimension
of my words sustain me,
keep my memories alive?**

Wild Thing

Wildness

waits to walk a narrow beam,
sing with reckless abandon
or simply try something new.

Paralyzed with indecision,
song without melody,
consumed with worry,
like a minor chord
in a soprano solo.

Stifling the impulse to be good,
hoping the only regrets
are what was never done,
preoccupied,
daring.

Longing to create disorder
in an orderly world,
the delinquent
willing to risk it all,
the trickster, the rebel,
on paper
in a poem.

On Relationships

Wet Paint

**Paintbrushes soak in a
pickle jar, bristles curving slightly,
sweeping the bottom in a pink cloudy swirl.**

**At every turn, tools
piled on all available surfaces,
jumbled heaps.**

**Wallpaper samples gathered relentlessly
roll after roll of repetition
until the perfect pattern appears.**

**Countertop decisions – tile or Formica,
light or dark, smooth or textured
which colors complement?**

**Hours spent working side by side
talking about choices,
appliances and space.**

**Talking about change and newness
the way we want things
to look in the future.**

**Through countless decisions
our pigments have settled
leaving just the right shade**

**Looking at this kitchen
at each other
for another twenty years.**

Rhythms

Sadness creeps up softly as a gentle breeze, suffocating laughter, condemning,
 threatening, yet warm, inviting, a blanket to enfold— love confuses, disturbs,
 angers, it holds tight to mistaken fingers of blame and guilt, pain rips
 my tattered edges, tears scald my face as I turn to the wall,
 needing your comfort, needing you, just you—words
 never spoken become a fog, isolating me
 from my dearest friend, leaving me--
 alone, the trail of words winds
 round and round through my
 head, much clearer to me
 even than my feelings,
 my fears—I'm
 losing you.
 No, I'm
 losing
 myself.
 Make it
 stop.

Joy
 crashes
 silently,
 gentle waves,
 and giant swells
 wash softly against
 the shoreline, creating
 new rhythms of warmth
 and peace, the touch of your
 hand, the brush of your lips on
 my face, tender teasing in a comfort
 zone where possibilities wing freely through
 my mind, your solid strength surrounds me with
 sheltering arms, holding me tight, protecting me
 from the jagged rocks and deadly currents, a buoy –
 holding steady in my tilting world, keeping me from listing,
 falling, sinking into the everyday depths of despair – calling me home
 to your warmth and your love, creating a safety net to cradle me. Don't ever stop.

Unraveling

Intricate silken threads
weave connections
from a mother to her child,
strong enough to weather storms
yet breakable by breath or sigh.

Poised upon the thread
she waits to see her babies grow,
oblivious to the obvious trail,
that leads
away from her.

Their choices made,
they forge ahead
without a backward glance,
approaching tasks, both big and small,
sometimes victor, sometimes fool.

Shimmering silently, spun with tears,
the threads begin to fail,
leaving a glimmer,
the faintest flash
of a beacon
lighting the homeward path.

Balancing Act

At the upward limits
of stress, fatigue sets in,
searing weary intent.
Eruptions of anger,
unheralded, spew
from pressurized heaps of
homework, essays,
Calculus, and fruit flies.
Competing agendas,
deadlines, exams
overwhelm
adolescent dreams.
Then, a heavy sigh and
a quick grin, a bowl of
Apple Jacks and
equilibrium
restores itself.

Parenting Rules

They don't tell you that the giving lasts a lifetime.

**That the wrinkled bundle of joy in your arms will one day
stomp her feet and scream you down for all the unfairness of her life.**

**That three simultaneous teenagers
will turn your hair gray – if not your head bald.**

**Of the nights you'll walk the floor, fretting over
missed curfews and the lame excuses to come.**

**And what of the mountains of dirty clothes,
stacked dishes, scattered toys, the toilet bowls
you've scrubbed between naps and playtime,
pickings-up at school
and deliveries to the ball field?**

**The cold knot of fear in your belly when the phone rings
at two in the morning and you mentally tick off
the places where they are supposed to be.**

**No one says that the pain you amazingly forget at childbirth
will return in waves only to be forgotten again when they say,
"I love you" or when they succeed.**

**They don't tell you how to respond when
that miracle of creation walks in with her new tattoo,
a tongue ring, purple hair to rival Medusa's.**

**When others say, it could be worse,
you can't even imagine that.**

**There's no instruction manual for those times
when the rules don't seem quite right
and you'd be afraid to break them.**

Two
-for my sister

Heartbeats floating in darkness
beneath a blue-veined mound, taut flesh.
Neophytes swim in soupy silence.

Identical boys who tug and pull
sharing secrets that will hatch into
wars, backyard wrestling, bicycle ramps.

Monitors, IV's, catheter tubes and beeps
fill the room with worry as
balloons and stuffed animals tempt out smiles.

Twin heartbeats floating in darkness
on a timetable all their own.
Impatient to get started
one life, divided,
multiplied
into two.

“Now we wait”

**My grandfather, here
between visits to the hospital
put in a garden in my backyard
next to the deck and the pool.**

**Spade in hand, his faded overalls
loose on his thinning frame, he showed me how far apart
the rows should be and how to till the soil.**

**Then, cupping the seeds, we dug
two knuckles deep – dropped them
and covered them. His gruff commands
answered by my apprentice hands.**

**Between shrieks and splashes, my children
looked, half-listened
while I learned life’s
lessons in the blackened dirt.**

Wednesday Lunch

My grandmother's table, solid and round
 a resting place for a year's worth of
 seasonal centerpieces,
 never discarded but saved,
 recycled week by week
 for me,
 an audience of one.

Salt and pepper hair, salt and pepper shakers
 numbered in the hundreds
 nestled, arranged with loving care
 reminders of a relative's trip,
 a son's gift,
 a granddaughter's love.

Chicken and dumplings, hot biscuits,
 fried chicken and sweet potatoes,
 country cooking, our plates overflowing.
 Have some more, bread, some dessert?
 Try this – Take care of yourself.
 Be happy. More?

Catching up on family connections,
 the latest book in my bag,
 other books she returns,
 our own lending library – private branch.
 We take on the world,
 CNN – Politics, she knows it all.
 The universe revolves
 around me,
 at my grandmother's table.

Hearts, Shamrocks, Easter Eggs
 Holly.
 May our turning years
 (though they must)
 never stop.

On Response

The Good Mother

**Always life was irregular
for that was the price of having
God in the house.**

**Mary, Joseph, and Jesus.
What ordinary small contentments
eluded this earthly family?**

**“Woman, what have I to do with thee?”
He knew His plan, we know the story
but she suffered sharply.**

**The mother, puzzled and hurt,
pondering his remarks in her heart,
faithful in the terrifying circumstances.**

**She chose not to spare herself sorrow
believing in Gabriel’s truth,
she stood by the cross.**

**After Jane Kenyon’s essay,
“Gabriel’s Truth”**

The Good Mother

**Always life was irregular
for that was the price of having
God in the house.**

**Mary, Joseph, and Jesus.
What ordinary small contentments
eluded this earthly family?**

**“Woman, what have I to do with thee?”
He knew His plan, we know the story
but she suffered sharply.**

**The mother, puzzled and hurt,
pondering his remarks in her heart,
faithful in the terrifying circumstances.**

**She chose not to spare herself sorrow
believing in Gabriel’s truth,
she stood by the cross.**

**After Jane Kenyon’s essay,
“Gabriel’s Truth”**

Living Water

**dancing fountains,
fish-filled streams,
Jacob's well
bubbling up, up, up,
an eternal spring
drenching my soul
with love,
passion
drink of Me**

Tamilnadu

**Transfixed by the pageantry
of ancient civilizations
she melts into the vast
sea of brown faces as the
celebration begins.
Royal dynasties, powerful
legends, ardent
worshippers fill the
square with legends of
the past and the promises.
Bronze sculptures
guard temple secrets,
silent sentinels in a
tropical afternoon breeze.
Sky, Water, Fire, Earth and Air
soothe her weary body
as she wriggles
her toes in the dust and
dreams of home –
the zest of spicy vegetables,
the comfort of spicy
swirling tea
the small space
within the courtyard
that is
hers alone.**

Ground Zero

There are no words
 strong enough
 for
TERROR devastation,
 despair,
 heaped in a
 mountain of twisted steel
 twin towers of hope
 for tomorrow

collapse

Dante's inferno,
 a pit
 of human sacrifice
 children's eyes see
 movie magic -
 special effects where
 dreams are demolished,
 war consumes our thoughts
 as we tactically target terror.

Silence deafens a country
 Desperate

Yahweh-God-Allah

for You.

Let the battle cry become a cry for peace.

Nine One One

**Freedom attacked
terror slammed
into innocence.**

**Hatred shatters steel,
crushing families, leaving
a portrait of what was.**

**Clouds of dust
a tidal wave
choking fear.**

**Sorrow spreads like flame
sending people to
their knees seeking**

Hope for America.

Frog Kisses

Warts, slime, and slick green skin
imprison her prince
in a swampy frog's paradise.

He watches her, watching him,
Wondering, if transformation exists at all,
whether he wants to change.

And what if she wades in, sinking
in brown muck to her knees, only to find
cold bulging eyes, and flies.

Throat ballooning, croak thrumming,
the silence broken, tongue darting,
he puckers for that smack.

Drawing deep, she takes the plunge,
licking nervous lips and stooping
toward her cross-eyed prince.

Lip-lock, smelly smooch,
his musty breath fogs toward
that froggie kiss, a bubble of hope.

Heavy lidded eyes half closed,
she sighs. The tingling from her lips
traveling straight to her

finely
Oh, no!
Webbed feet!

Dizzyland

Fast roller coasters
concealed in dark mountains
adding fear to the exhilaration of speed.

River rafts, alligators
half-dressed natives-
the Captain's spiel just
brushing the edge of political correctness.

Teacups twirling in a music box
of sugary, sweet smiles,
a mini-delegation, a parade of nations
in miniature faces.

A castle, smaller than I imagined,
the centerpiece in this fairy tale
run amuck, each story overlapping,
miasmas of cartoon fantasy.

Haunted houses,
holograph ghosts floating eerily nearby
just spooky enough so young girls
hang on to their guy for dear life.

Cabaret-type shows
break the day
into easier to handle segments
a toe-tapping foot rest.

Bicoastal replicas of
idealized fun, fling out the
red carpet for visitors –
to vertiginous worlds
of exhausting excitement.

The Five-and-Dime

In my girlhood, Woolworth's or Wacker's
were our choices for abundant display
of seemingly useful necessities.
Bubbling tanks with goldfish
and neon rocks, a solitary deep-sea
diver wandering over blue gravel.
Hamsters dash through
wheels spinning, tunnels
connecting rodent cities.
Plastic dishes, drinking cups,
Barbies, trucks, jump-ropes,
Chinese checkers, gold loopy earrings,
rhinestone studded Valentine lips,
Blinking lights and Ouiji boards.
Dimestores dedicated to thinginess,
last minute gifts for every occasion
and the stuff is really cheap.
Their soda fountains' vinyl-wrapped
barstools spin like tops--our
legs and arms flailing as the
manager yells "Get out!"

Final Four

**Silk and sweat
orchestrated to perfection
against a backdrop of
blaring brass and screams.
Young gods, magnified
by media coverage,
weave a magical tapestry
of athleticism and
grace – balancing
a diploma against
the millions to be made.
Bodies crashing, boards
crashing, hanging on
hoops, hanging their
hopes above the rim.**

selection

**always such a positive word
selected to play the lead
selected to be team captain
selected to lead the march**

**until the moment I look
into his eyes, cold, unfeeling
flickering with hatred, doubt
bottomless pools of disgust**

**shoulders back, chin high
a half-moon smile tilting hesitantly
lips thin and quivering
betraying my fear**

**music fills my head
the rumbling train a bass line
and children's cries
staccato intrusions**

**death waits, drawing dread
in gray skies as I stand
frozen, a Nazi symphony building
as the earth holds her breath**

left, he motions

selected.

Multiple Instances

Pulling out the dusty album, she pauses—just so—
and says with a smile, “I’m a collector, you know.”
Confused, but polite, I nod, my mind begins to stray
to the various collections I’ve seen in my day.
My dad collects belt buckles of every shape and size
gold, silver, leather, steel, even one with staring eyes.
My mom, her foibles are birdhouse and bell
of crystal or porcelain, they play melodies as well.
Grandma’s choices are pepper and salt,
we fetch shakers from everywhere so its not just her fault.
My affection lies completely with dolls of all kind
a throwback to childhood, every baby I find.
From “interesting” to “unique”, simply weird to rare
An assortment gathered with the greatest of care.
I’m curious to see what has cluttered her life
“It takes more than looks to make a good wife.”
Introduces life’s strangest—I’ve searched far and wide
Collection— her “Book of the Ugliest Brides.”

On Reflection

Life Giver

Quilted cotton stitched invisibly
a pastiche of remembrances.
The miracle of birth in vibrant colors,
handcrafted,
a masterpiece
reflecting the joy and awe of creation,
the challenge of shaping a life.
Fluid moments frozen on a cloth canvas.

Teaching a child to play by the rules,
the importance of a jump shot,
of following her heart, the gift of poetry,
hard work, love.

Sharing the knowledge that
the teacher isn't always right,
sharing the comfort in the pages
of a good book, the thrill of winning a race,
views on eternity, self-determination, peace,
and the convenience of a frozen pizza.

Life
Earth Mother

Giver

I'm Passionate

**about causes and atrocities,
faith and goodness,
writing, reading,
hot tamales
cornhusks and simmering spices
red, cinnamon candy.**

**about my children,
their father, my students, my work,
my home
about musicals,
old ones with elaborate costumes,
songs bursting forth from nowhere
to inspire a toe tapping response.**

**about flowers, perfume,
Hallmark and holidays
but never boxed chocolates
lined up in compulsive orderly rows
or diamonds sparkling and commonplace
demanding a programmed response.**

**I'm passionate about words, thoughts, phrases,
conversation and concern,
poetry and prose-
in a glass house with a man named Miracle
his wife Idea and their children Repose.**

Aftertaste

**The mother, the wife,
lone constant in the chaos of her home,
restless and wary, she balances,
steps careful,
afraid of the drop.**

**The shrew, the nag,
the picker-up of things,
solver of problems,
Work Horse
end up in a glue factory
or is that a myth?**

**Cappuccino, mocha latte,
chocolate frappacino,
peach tea.
She loves
the flavor of the words
much more than the
bitter fluids in
porcelain cups.**

**Contradictions and conflict,
victories and snapshots,
moments of
poetry and hope.**

**In her head,
her shadow stands
on a narrow ledge,
plastered against a dark sky
seeking to step out
onto a star.**

After An Argument

Muffling cries with a fisted hand
she waits for anger to pass
in waves and trickles.
Deep breaths, quiet sobs
then sleep comes
deep and empty.
First light, she awakens,
puffy eyes,
cobwebbed memories,
a certain resolve.
Swinging upright she stretches
and sighs, reaches
to turn on *Today*
comedy and tragedy,
complete with commercials.
Contemplating hope,
feeling life resonate.

Windsong

Leaves skitter across asphalt
resting, occasionally, as the wind inhales
preparing its next big breath.
Muffled motors hum in the distant background
adding a bass rumble to the wind's song.

Why? Why? Why?

A staccato of birdsong
pierces the silence
as the wind gathers, swells, falls,
rises, whispers and whistles,

crescendos

sings her relentless song.

Bubble Bath

Nostalgic moments
arrive in bubbles.

Steam misted
perfumed foam baths
brew new worlds,
percolate
images of my past,
my grandmother's past,
pasts that never happened
possible, probable
futures.

Soaking dreams
in the heat of creation
and the poetry
of soothing
waters.

Summer Camp

Sun and sweat, official introduction
to summer, the woman steps from
the bus into a civilized wilderness.

Air conditioned bunkhouses
replacing the camp of her childhood,
yet baseball diamonds, canoes in the lake and the
dining hall echo with whispers
of familiarity.

Here, rock bands and media worship replace
soft spoken pastors,
paperback hymn books.

Recreation time, Camp Olympics,
tournament teams.

Kum Ba Yah, Dance to the Lord
she finds in the mix,
a spirit of community,
voices lifted in praise,
a time for focus,
fulfillment,
and the fun of
summer camp.

Fiasco?

**Just another weekend
in a cycle of cleanliness,
laundry piled by colors
the tide of housework
swamps her with tedium.
It's her day, a birthday
forty one years to
celebrate.**

**Can she sweep away the years,
like so many cobwebs,
dust memories
and porcelain dolls,
light her own
candles, meadow fresh
and cinnamon?
Wishing for celebration,
searching for gifts,
she's finding them
everywhere.**

Tag! You're It

**I'm swamped by laughter
bubbling
from an inner pool**

**red paint
on a child's playhouse**

**a Volkswagon
camper in seventies' plaid green**

**strawberries and cream
and a lover's touch**

**a mystery hiding
behind these words**

**answers to
satisfy my thirst**

**shouting my name, shadows
step into the light**

**simply disappearing
as the chase begins
again**

Psssst...She Said

**Gossip swirls in angry clouds
dark and ugly putrid thoughts,
vile innuendo**

**or
“just news.”**

**Accusations soar toward their target
damning darts of venom
seeking softness.**

**Lies hide in the shadow of smiles,
sneering invisibly
waiting to strike with subtle suggestion.**

**Cloaked in disguise,
under the cover of
words.**

**Secrets simmer and stew, changing subtly,
acid burning a hole in quiet resolve.**

Doll Baby

Ruffles and lace,
silks in deep crimson
and forest green
elaborate hats and parasols,
porcelain faces
wearing glazed expressions
of serenity,
lips pouting slightly,
eyes wide and glassy,
hooded by dark lashes and curls.

Lullabies, forgotten tears,
dry words silent,
a pedestal holds her
poised to preen
captured
in an hourglass
without sand
where time
never
passes her by.

Loose Ends

Pinball action inside my head
crashing noise, bright lights, chaos
more headache than arcade game.

With each ricochet and bounce,
my ends are in knots
connected to something else,
huge webs of knotted lengths
that lead nowhere.

But then again,
loose ends should lead to nothing –
a nowhere in which I can lounge around
in my nightgown

creating masterpieces,
or at least funny little poems
interesting strands of thought.

I could enjoy something looser.
Thoughts with no ends would surely give me
“material” – you would think.

At loose ends, I would lie in my hammock
with the latest trashy novel or
do housework because I wanted to
not from the need to crash a path
through the living room.

I would read the poetry of masters
instead of rhymed couplets by eighth graders.

I would shop for something sassy instead
of Easy Spirits for my aching feet.

I would acquire a taste
for coffee and eat pralines without guilt.

Loose ends? I want some.