A Legacy in Verse

(current update: 09/28/26)

Ernest L. Pancsofar

I was reading through my verses of rhyme
To assemble a sample of 27 at this time.
These reflections to me have great meaning
In different points in my life as I was gleaning
What gave me an appreciation for a life gone by
Guided by the questions who, what, where and why.
I offer these passages for you to review
From different ages about the truths I knew
That guided me along my life's journey
That continues to be the adventures of Ernie!

It is in the searching that unexpected finds occur.
It is in the wondering that new connections are made.
It is in the sharing that the greatest learning happens.

A Legacy in Verse

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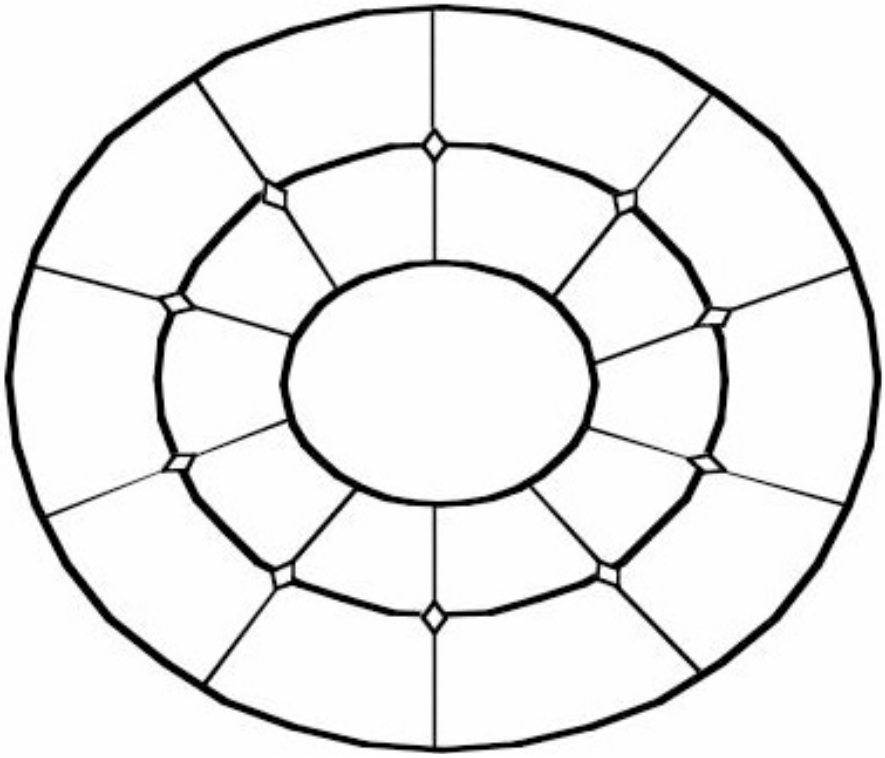
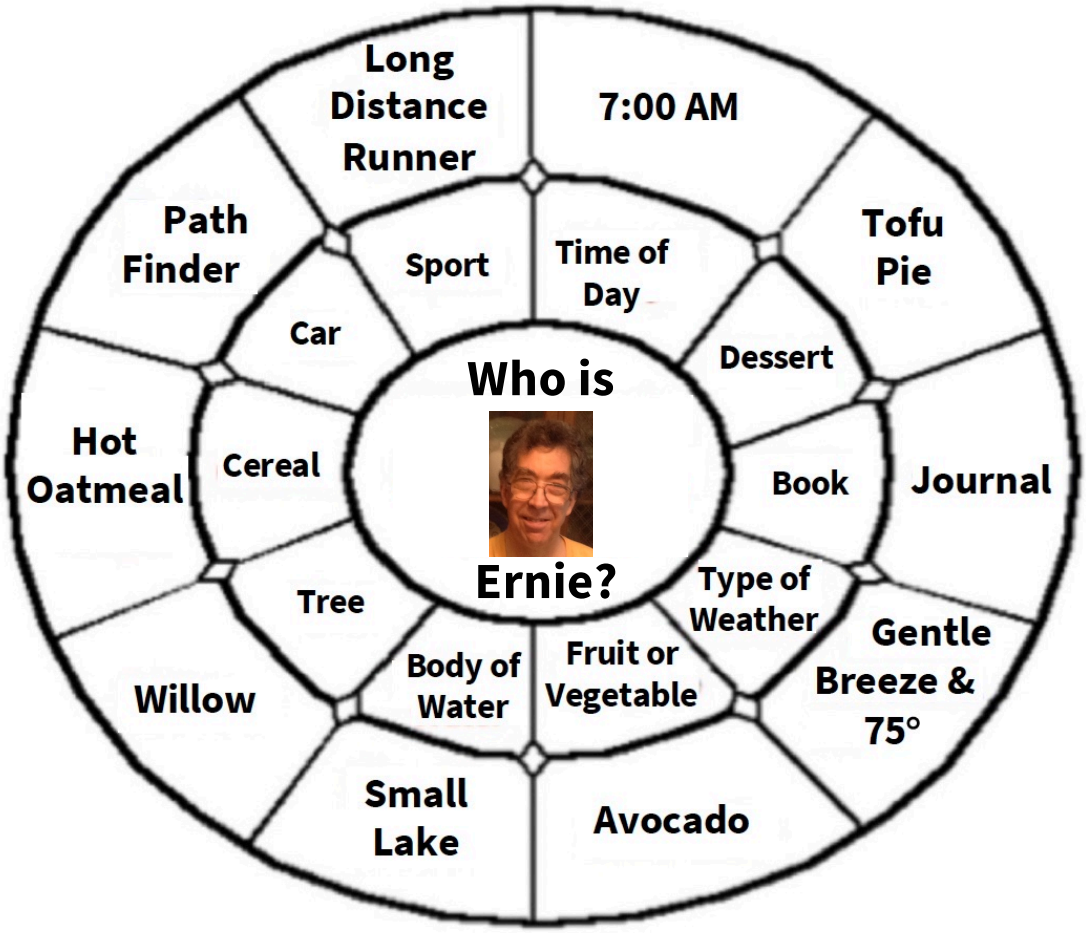
A Profile Using Analogies

In the context of this entry, an analogy is a representation of part of our being expressed by its similarity with an external object/event/structure. An analogy is not something we may like such as an apple, which we think of as a delicious fruit. Rather, an analogy is part of our being like an apple: the sustenance of an apple lies under its peel in a way that the essence of our being lies under our skin. To use another example, I may like to ski in the wintertime. However, skiing may represent a freedom of movement, feeling the wind in my face and the refreshing sense of accomplishment and well being.

I often use an image of concentric circles when developing a personal profile and I will use the blank visual below in this entry.



Note to reader: ***In its initial version, I referred to elements of this profile using metaphors. Upon further analysis, my examples fall more in the category of analogies.***



Analogies To a … :

Time of Day
Dessert
Book
Type of Weather
Fruit / Vegetable
Body of Water
Tree
Cereal
Car
Sport

Who Is Ernie?

This person called "Ernie"
Is on a long journey:
A marathon man
With a long-distance plan
To lead a life of quality
Currently at the university.

A gentle breeze flows by,
75 degrees and a sunlit sky.
Refreshing air
Blows through his hair.
To lead a life of quality,
One needs a bit of tranquility.

7:00 AM is a great time of day;
The sun is up as I pave my way
To that first cup of coffee
Sets my mind to move free.
To lead a life of quality,
A drink to add some clarity.

Tofu pie is a nutritious snack
That represents his vegetarian knack
To eat good food
For a pleasant mood
To lead a life of quality
As he eats today most healthily.

A Path Finder would be an admirable car
To search for truths in places afar
And venture off the open road
And use the 4-wheel driving mode
To lead a life of quality
In an out-of-the-way locality.

Hot oatmeal warms from the inside out.
It may even cause a person to shout
That there is always more than one way
As I get out and begin a brand-new day
To lead a life of quality
With good food to aid vitality.

An avocado is a unique type of food:
A shell on the outside the substance of wood.
But the nutritious substance that lies within
Adds richness to salads when sliced pretty thin.
To lead a life of quality,
Eat food rich in diversity.

The willow tree bends but does not break.
Its leaves reach out to those who ache
And need shelter from the gathering storm
When their behavior fits not the norm.
To lead a life of quality,
Bend like the willow most gracefully.

An abundance of life lies in a small lake
With room for everyone to plan and make
Their presence known and felt by all
Whether they be big or whether they be small.
To lead a life of quality,
Live within your own ecology.

Finally, a journal is a constant friend
That will stay with you right up to the end.
Pages of words in poems and thought
And important lessons to me have taught.
To lead a life of quality,
Live out your dreams in their entirety.

The Path of the Perfecting Teacher, p. 2

The Faces of Phases

My past is out of order
in a chronology of time.
The phases of these faces
lead to my current rhyme.

Dylan captured this paradox
in *Tangled up in Blue*.
I'm shaped by my impressions
of this personal picture stew.

My reflections of my twenties
are influenced by what I know
Of life when I was forty -
It's a blur as my age does grow.

Am I the sum of all my past?
Is now all there is for me?
I think I remembered – No, I just forgot
a part of what used to be.

The Path of the Perfecting Teacher, p. 21

I decided to place different pictures of myself within the block lettering of my initials. I intentionally distributed them in a random order and thought of the Dylan song, Tangle Up in Blue, which is often described as a kaleidoscopic set of verses that don't necessarily represent a chronological sequence of events within the song. I like the end result.

My 32nd Birthday

I've reached the age of thirty-two;
I don't feel old and I don't feel blue;
A little more weight and out of shape
But not enough to contemplate
Doing much about it.

Living here in Bowling Green;
Better places I have seen.
The work is nice
But once or twice
We've talked of moving on.

The children are heading off to school
No more park and no more pool.
Students fill the classes now
But still I often wonder how
They grew up quite too fast.

The Water-Soaked Journals (1982-1983)
Drawing by a student in my course, p. 49
poem, p. 56

Being 72

Ring them bells and bring on good cheer
Ernie's celebrating his 72nd year!

Living each day – hour – minute - 1 at a time
Turning potential lessons into a rhyme.

I am in the closing years of my life
Providing caring and support to Marsha, my wife.

Money may bring riches, some might say
But my life is enriched each and every day.

Like watching the birds as a calming task -
They give no answers, so I don't ask.

My pace of movement may be slow
But this much I think I know –
It's not a race – this life I live
It's more about what I have to give

Toward a direction not quite clear
However, knowing Marsha will be quite near.

2023 Elements for August 27, 2023
pancsofarblog.com

Processing the Loss of a Loved One

First, it's a life-time experience
Of memories, the order of which, jumbles in my mind.
There is no "getting over it"
When missing a one-of-a-kind.

The solitude can be both welcoming and bring sadness
When I don't see you on the other side of the room.
The silence allows for fewer distractions
And can even lessen some of the gloom.

You had a rough journey
Held in dementia's grip.
Yet, you were always graceful
On this unexpected trip.

I learned a great deal
By being by your side.
When my time comes a callin'
Please come back to be my guide.

Time passes by
In oh so many ways.
I'm glad I was here to witness
The closing of your days.

Memorial Tribute, p. 18

Marsha Pancsofar
1949 - 2025

Tangled Up in Bellevue

The train pulled in and I got off;
Started my usual routine.
Stopped on the stairs to make my escape
Grew faint from my morning caffeine.

The ambulance sped on ahead
With me in the back for a ride.
I didn't know what would become of me;
I guess it wasn't up to me to decide.

I had a job 12 blocks away
From the hospital that I did enter.
They expected me at 9:00
I was to be the main presenter . . .

Near Second Avenue,
But instead . . . I'm Tangled up in **B**el**l**ev**ue**.

Someone came over to the side of my bed.
She said her name was Mrs. Paul.
She asked who I was and where I was from
And in her book my name she did scrawl.

Some were homeless and some were thieves.
Some were just presenters by day.
Some recovered in detox from drugs.
Some had a lot to say.

I entertained myself as best I could;
Peered through the bars of my bed.
I don't belong here at all
Wish I could leave now but instead . . .

I felt everyone knew - - -
I was Tangled up in **B**el**l**ev**ue**.

This poem captures the surrealistic experience of being a patient in the emergency room at Bellevue Hospital in New York City. The exact date escapes me. It is intended to accompany the Dylan tune, Tangled Up in Blue.

Tangled Up in Bellevue (continued)

People came and people went;
Misery could be heard in each voice.
No one was here voluntarily.
No one was here by choice.

What is normal is foreign to me.
It seems like I'm in a dream.
The plot doesn't seem to make any sense;
I didn't get any ice cream.

A community of strangers stares back at me.
What will be in store?
When will I leave – Where will I go?
I don't know if it's 1:00 or it's 4:00 …

I wish that I knew,
but I'm Tangled Up in **B**el**l**ev**ue**.

Twenty-one years have come and gone.
I've moved on to other places;
But I know I will never soon forget
All the emergency room faces.

I didn't know if the sun came out
Or whether it rained all day.
All I know about that fact is
Whether I would leave or stay.

The people there have gone back to their lives
And I have done so too;
But I realize that for all these years
I still haven't got a clue …

But I've paid my dues . . .
Tangled up in **B**el**l**ev**ue**.a

How Bob Dylan Influences My Life and Work -
A Never-Ending Document, p. 17

Teaching and Learning

Teaching is not about what is taught.
Teaching is always about what is sought.
Teaching is more about finding our path.
Teaching is not only about reading and math.

Learning is not about what is learned.
Learning is more about what is yearned.
Learning is about understanding oneself.
Learning is taking more books from the shelf.

Testing is not about what's on the test.
Testing is not about knowing who's best.
Testing just makes us compete for the prize.
Testing just brings on a great, big demise.

Education is not about who is educated.
Education is more about who is dedicated.
Education is about building community.
Education is about individuality.

Grades are not about what is graded.
Grades are a curse that need to be faded.
Grades cause harm and move us apart.
Grades exist for only the smart.

Success is not about who can succeed.
Success is for all of the students in need.
Success is about finding our own abilities.
Success is for ending all hostilities.

Achievement is not about who can achieve.
Achievement brings promise and cannot deceive.
Achievement occurs when all can advance.
Achievement brings honor and joy to enhance.

Students are teachers and learners too.
Their paths connect each day that they do
Believe that creativity and learning can be fun
After each school day's work is said to be done.

On the Path of the Perfecting Teacher, Step 57, p. 61

Sums up my thoughts on the current education system.

Sample Reflections During a First Year of Life

Three steps – you're off! You're starting to walk!
I heard all about it – your parents did talk
About this – your big accomplishment
In this stage of your initial development.

Now, you're searching and moving around
And mastery of walking you have found
Make the adults so gleeful and happy
You're thinking they get a little bit sappy.

What's the big deal? You may ask
As master of this simple upright task.
It takes much more effort to crawl around
And you don't fall too far when you hit the ground.

Milestones come and milestones go
We mark the calendars so we can show
How brilliantly smart you can be.
Next you can master just where you should pee!

I don't mean to make light of your new walking skill
You can get to more places much faster – you will
Balance yourself and become more steady
Give me a call when you are ready –

To explore spaces beyond current boundaries
I'll help you around – don't scrape your knees
I guess it is a BIG deal after all
To be walking about and ceasing to crawl.

Good Luck! You will gather some bumps and bruises
The result of some mishaps along your brief cruises.
But, with practice, persistence and patience too
All of the world will be open to you!

Ernie's Journey, Reflections in Verse – Volume 2, p. 40+

One of several observations about my grandson, Leo Dylan Schmidt, that I wrote during his first year of life.

Choice

Somebody asked me, “What do you choose?”
How can I answer: Will I win? Will I lose?

“What do you choose?” is loaded with meaning
Pepsi or Coke or to go out for this evening.

Are you talking about food or a new place to live?
Are you talking of my life or what you will give?

Are you listening to me tell my dreams that I wish
Or, are you fooling around with new words on a dish

That you offer to me? It sounds very good.
But, it’s hard to believe you -- I wish that I could.

My dreams for the future are hard to express.
My dreams and my visions are right now a guess.

I need some more options to be in my life.
I need some one near me to hear of my strife.

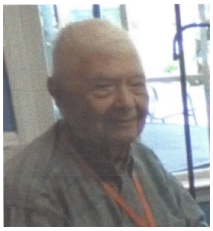
Choices you offer may not be for me.
And choices I ask for, we all won’t agree.

Let’s talk about choice and see what it means
As you sit here and listen to each of my dreams.

Ernie’s Journey, Reflections in Verse – Volume 1, p. 48

Providing choices to individuals is an often sought after value when providing support and assistance for individuals with cognitive disabilities. I wondered about the range of options that are offered when the provider of those choices is in charge.

Father's Day Tribute
June 19, 2022



F aithful
A rticulate
T hankful
H ard working
E thical
R esourceful
H usband
O pen minded
O riginal
D evoted

Our dad is **Faithful** to the values
he holds true.
He is **Articulate** when sharing what
each of us must do

And **Thankful** in all
that we have and treasure
To be **Hard working** in both work
and for pleasure.

Our dad is **Ethical** in his beliefs
of right and wrong
And how to be **Resourceful**
and how to be strong.

He is a loving **Husband**
to a life-long companion and friend
And remains **Open minded**
to life's issues both now and then.

He remains an **Original** icon
as we take this time to say
We are **Devoted** to him
throughout each day.

This entry is hanging on a bulletin board in my bedroom. Viewing it again has inspired me to curate all the poems / visuals / commentaries I have written to honor my dad. I will share the results with siblings and contribute to a tribute booklet at future family gatherings. Currently, as of September 28, 2026, my dad is 108 years old.

A Work in Progress

Everything I do is a work in progress.
Some might think that this adds to my stress
Of never completing projects to show,
But everything can be improved some more, you know.

Each time I teach one of my courses
I'm likely to find some more resources
That add richness to what I have to say
When I teach that session on an upcoming day.

I would say I have twenty such projects on the shelf
And each one relates to my outer or inner self.
There's a series of activities to enhance creative lessons
And poems and essays for more personal reflections.

I don't really care if any of my projects get done
'Cause then I would be minus one activity that's fun.
Each one advances and becomes much more polished
Until I have to present it or maybe it gets published.

But that doesn't mean that the project is through;
I just may think of adding something brand new.
So, I put it back in its own special file
And then take it out after awhile.

We are each works in progress as we go about each day.
We all have our challenges in our own unique way.
I heard Jimmy Carter talk of a cancer that grows
In his body from his liver to his brain and he knows
That he's lived a good life and his faith is quite strong;
His life has been full of righting what's wrong

A Work in Progress (continued)

We never know how much longer we will live
Or how much more to our projects we'll give.
It's not the completion of our work that gives meaning.
It's how that work changes our inner core feelings.
We are who we are - - - not what we have done.
It's back to a project to get back to some fun!.

Ernie's Journey, Reflections in Verse – Volume 2, p. 12

I mention Jimmy Carter in this poem; a person for whom I had a great deal of admiration. I am reminded of a quote from him about his wife, Rosalynn that I also included in my wife Marsha's Memorial Tribute:

Rosalynn was my equal partner in everything I ever accomplished. She gave me wise guidance and encouragement when I needed it. As long as Rosalynn was in the world, I always knew somebody loved and supported me."

– –

I Come With What I Have

I walk the path I'm on.
There is impermanence from where I come.
My ancestors walk with me wherever I go
And I can feel your presence as well.
I remember reading a quote at the Denver Airport:
"I have arrived, I am here.
My destination is in each step." Thich Nhat Hanh
My history is in each step – I am here body and soul.
I carry memories, however distorted they may be.
I walk the labyrinthian path toward a final place of rest
But meanwhile, every place is here and every time is now.

Based on a writing prompt offered by* Pádraig Ó Tuama *in his SubStack: Poetry Unbound

Reflections on the Next Phase of Life Without Marsha's Physical Presence

What kind of future am I viewing?
What to spend my time on doing
Or is just being present enough?
Will my path be smooth or rough?

Now is the time of pausing
To note what may be causing
Me to better understand that future wealth
May be better tied to my overall health.

Of course, wealth in my view is not tied to money
But living my truths on my continuing journey.
It's been a lifetime development so far
Not to keep those truths from hiding in a jar!

Sometimes I'm confused about just where to go
And who to meet who might just know
The opportunities that exist around every bend
As the questions are more important in the end.

Where should I focus my attention
Amid this time of reflection?
Does it matter where I go in this search?
Do the birds know the way from their higher perch?

We all can improve in everything we do.
This I know In my own life is true.
Perfection is a myth that cannot be attained
Perfecting our lives, though, can be gained.

Being present, as I take a deep breath within
Brings me peace of mind from where to begin
Activities that flow in their own time and space
As I continue my day in my current place.

Each dawn a new day begins
My aching body calls from within
"Get up!" it warns, if you want to make any progress.
As it reminds me of my aging process.

Reflections on the Next Phase of Life
Without Marsha's Physical Presence (continued)

Simple is as simple does
Today is now, yesterday was.
It's already a distant memory
Filed in its very own category.

It is possible to achieve much more
But in the end who's keeping score?
It's not a game that one can win;
It's a sense of satisfaction within.

Making mistakes is all part of living
In doing so we are giving
Others our own personal history
Filled with growth and mystery.

Waiting for something to happen
Can, itself, be a critical time in
Which we prepare for where
To go from here to there.

Embracing uncertainty can be fun.
It's not really the work to be done,
But the way in which we move about
Amid the chaos and the doubt.

There is no future that is obvious to me
So I'll just have to let it be
And stay in the moment and see
What will be a next opportunity.

As I conclude this Futures Planning
On Thanksgiving Day while granting
Myself an ending poetic space
I am content as I say grace.

Reflections in Verse and Brief Essays, p. 23

While plotting out my future direction, I wrote this poem to establish a baseline from where to begin the next phase of my life.

My Daughters Are Like a Dream

Nadya and Natyra are like a dream.
I just have to stop and say
It's a joy to be a dad in their lives
And see them grow up each day.

Dads can learn much about themselves
As they interact with their kids:
Tolerance levels & frustration points
Happy times or when they hit the skids.

The purpose in life is so plain to see
As you watch your children grow.
It's to learn from them about yourself
They'll share many things you've yet to know.

Children ask their questions – no secrets to bear
About love, hate, peace and war
But sometimes they just want to find out
How does the tooth fairy get through a locked door?

Watching Nadya and Natyra develop
Reminds me that I have much more to do
To help them become young, adult women
And each live a life that is true.

Ernie's Journey, Reflections in Verse – Volume 2, p. 28

Without a doubt, my two daughters have been a constant force of good in my life. Their presence enriches my life beyond measure.

Looking for the Evidence of Community on 5/31/1997

On my walk a bagpipe played
At the church along the way.
I walked on by - listened a bit
On this sunny day.

The bagpipe played a funeral dirge
As the mourners came out of the church.
I walked along and heard the sound
As I continued on my search.

A walk is a walk - An end in itself.
I choose to be on this journey.
The goal is not to get to a place,
But to build a better Ernie.

Step by step and mile by mile
I'm off to my destination.
Day by day - and year by year
My journey's the celebration.

It's not the dream or the goal or the race.
It's the journey upon which we have to keep pace
And look at how much better we feel!
That's exactly the price it takes to be real.

Ernie's Journey, Reflections in Verse – Volume 1, p. 74

I was struck by the contrast of the unexpected sound of bagpipes as I walked down Main Street in Manchester, CT. I wasn't going any specific place but stop to listen and watch what was occurring at a nearby church. My journey continues while being aware of the presence of death whose timetable is unknow to those on its schedule.

Reflection 1

After listening to the Paul Simon tune, One Man's Ceiling is Another Man's Floor, I composed a poem of opposites and concluded with the mystery of perspective.

One person's mistake is another one's stepping stone.
Even in a crowd, one can be quite alone.

One team's win is another team's loss.
One person's aide is another person's boss.

One person's strength is another person's weakness.
All the horses can't win in the Preakness.

One person's tall is another person's short.
One neighbor's snowbank is another youth's fort.

We live in a world of opposites.
Contradictions abound in our composites.

We are some and we are many.
We are none and we can be any.

Be content with who you are
'Cause our one sun is just someone's else's star.

Then / Now / Beyond, p. 03

– –

The Missing Puzzle Piece

This poem originated after I had completed a jigsaw puzzle with the 1,000th piece missing.

We are always "becoming" … in motion – transforming.
We are the pause between our incoming and outgoing breath,
Yet it's never a fixed point.
It's a transition from – to.
There are "missing pieces" to our movements:
We are never "whole" but reaching toward wholeness.
Perfection is a myth – a perfect self is a myth.
Normal is a myth.
There can be pleasantness and satisfaction
On the journey to a better understanding of who we are.
We are on a current path leading to our physical death.
But, as we take our final breath, we are still becoming - - -
That which is the essence of who we are
Is not restricted by our bodies.
It moves on.
Where it moves is a mystery: a becoming of another existence –
We take with us, within that transition, all our past experiences - - -
To our next adventure - even with all our missing pieces!

In Search of Community

Where is community? I asked.
Is it future? Is it past?
Where is community? came the reply.
It is ground. It is sky.

What is community? I then wondered.
Is it up? Is it under?
What is community? I heard it cry.
It is presence. It can never die.

How is community? I still proposed.
Is it poetry? Is it prose?
How is community? Came back my quest.
It is here – a welcome guest.

Why is community? Again, I sighed
Why is community? it still replied.

The silence is broken by the sound of a bell.
Community echoes at the bottom of your well.

The Path of the Perfecting Teacher, p. 60

This is one of my favorite poems and an interesting story relates to its origin. I was at a conference in West Virginia when I asked if there was anyone in the audience of about 150 people who could draw an object on a transparency during the next five minutes. One woman raised her hand and I gave her some transparency markers and asked her to draw a wishing well. After a few minutes she drew a great wishing well and I read my poem after which I placed her drawing on the overhead projector. Her drawing had enriched my presentation. I built this lesson into my presentation.

> ***The community is composed of people with a great deal of talent who are ready to support us in our work, but we need to ask! Her skills as an artist were not made known to the entire community of conference participants until I made my request. She offered her gift willingly and also enriched my poem through the fruits of her talents.***

Family Reunion in 2003 in North Carolina

From the west and north they came –
Some looked different – some looked the same
To meet in Greensboro, this large family –
For the Pancsofar Reunion in 2003.

On July 19th on a Saturday night
They gathered for food, fun and delight.
Some were from Maine and others from Dover;
This tale is 'bout the people who came from all over.

The guests of honor throughout the day and night
Were Nanna and Poppa – in whose sight
We arrived from afar to gather near
And celebrate our love by being here.

The conversations evolved around board games:
SCRABBLE, Balderdash, “I Doubt It” were names
Of a few that engaged several players in talk
And at times there was even time for a walk.

Some people slept on floors or in a bed;
Some people opted for a motel instead;
Some people retired early and others stayed up late;
Some people ate a little – others cleared their plate.

The Krispy Cream Men arrived one day with zeal,
As they brought the dessert for the mid-day meal.
As the men in their hats brought the donuts in here,
They were welcomed with laughter and great cheer.

Each person had a tale – each person had a story
Of what they contributed to the Pancsofar family.
Each was successful in the paths they had chosen
Working from the heart and from their own passion.

We will look at the pictures a few weeks from now
And wonder about this reunion and how
Such a mixture of talent and skills did abound
In one family who met on this common ground.

Family Reunion in 2003 in North Carolina

Even when our thoughts and opinions may differ,
I think it's this difference that makes us all richer.
We blend all our talents into several great goals;
It's good for our hearts - it's good for our souls.

Personal Journal 2003

Meanwhile in 2015:

Marsha and Mary had a great idea(r)
We'll have a Chili Cook Off at the reunion this year.
Mary will follow her recipe for twenty
With Marsha's veggie option, there'll be chili a plenty.

When the cooking was done, they waited in anticipation
For the reunion guests to vote their appreciation.
Each person took a spoonful of each of the brew
Some from cup 1 and some from cup 2.

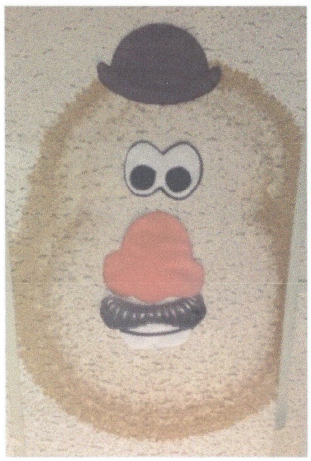
Mary beamed brightly – it could be a roll of the dice
Marsha demanded a recount thinking Gene voted twice.
Alas, the chili that was thought to taste best
Had meat in its recipe – Mary won the test.

However, all guests did attest that they both did their best
And both were winners of the chili cook off dinner.
The prizes were equal and were of premium worth
And at next year's reunion another contest will go forth!

Personal Journal 2015

A Creative Moment

As I took a drink from my coffee cup,
I noticed a stain as I looked up.
I contacted maintenance and to my surprise,
After they looked at it with their very own eyes,
Declared that there was nothing more to do.
They had no explanation for why this stain grew.
But said not to worry, it was no big deal,
Even though I thought it took away from the appeal
Of working in my office – day in and day out.
It was soon forgotten – I had no more clout.
But it was embarrassing when a student came in
And looked at this sight with some chagrin.



One day a thought occurred to me –
Beautiful Oops was a book I did see
That talked about creativity and fun:
A book given to my own grandson.
Make something beautiful out of this mess;
Add some details – add some finesse
And lo and behold, what sight did appear -
Mr. Potato Head looking for an ear!
And I can build my very own versions
And creatively make my own conversions
Of a stain that evoked dirt and grime
Into a character to include in this rhyme.

The Path of the Perfecting Teacher, p. 19

I was tired of looking up at the ceiling of my office to find an unsightly stain staring back at me. Then I had a thought …

A Rocking Chair Was There

A rocking chair was there
Inviting me to it.
To close my eyes and feel the sun
Be still, be quiet, just sit.

A rocking chair was there
I could have passed it by ---
But tomorrow - When I come back,
Someone else may hear its call;
Taken a seat as they begin to meet
The dawning of that day.

A rocking chair was there.
Its symbol may not be clear.
It was empty and needed a hug;
A person to fill its void.
I sat down - warmed its seat,
Got up and prepared to meet
My day ---

The things that I do
The people I meet
Will be influenced by the warmth of that seat.
They didn't see the rocking chair -
At the beach -- out of reach,
But they felt its presence in how
I developed the pattern of my day.

Ernie's Journey, Reflections in Verse – Volume 2, p. 19

The inspiration for this poem occurred early one morning as I was taking a walk around the grounds of the Mercy Center in Madison, CT where I was attending a weekend workshop.

Purpose

Blisters hurtin' - - - nothin's certain.
Life can bring a sigh or scream.
Blisters turn to callous soon.
Learn from those who live their dream.

Everyone has many talents
To use - - - not throw away
And we often have to answer to
Our conscience day-by-day.

No one can tell us exactly how long
The length of time is along the way.
So live each day to the full extent
And at life's end you'll have lots to say

About inner feelings of what is right
And in what direction you did go
And how you used your talents and gifts
In a way that only you did know.

The road can be long – the path can be steep.
It's a journey of wonder and delight.
And the strength you build along the way
Makes your goals turn out just right.

Wonder, awe, peace and love
Are the ultimate aspirations
Of a life well lived and a time well spent
In our final deliberations.

Ernie's Journey, Reflections in Verse – Volume 1, p. 78

This poem evolved over several years as I was reflecting on specific events that were unfolding in my life.

A Series of Unfortunate Events

(with apologies to Lemony Snicket for the title and
John Prine for the melody from the song "Everybody" that's playing in my head)

While out riding in my Saturn, while out riding in good cheer.
I looked upon the calendar and it was the start of a brand new year.
I got home and took a call – it was from a Hartford doctor
And the news she gave me on the phone was really quite a shocker.

She said, "Ernie, I have some news for you and I hope you're sitting down,
'Cause the news I'll give is sure enough and bound to make you frown.
The tests we took from you just about ten days ago
Show that deep within your body some cancer cells do grow."

Chorus:

Sometimes life is funny –
And sometimes life is not
Sometimes life's too cold –
And sometimes it's too hot.
But life is full of wonder –
Each and every day
And life turns out to be just fine
As I journey on my way.

2007 will surely be a most memorable year!
An important event will happen in a day that is quite near.
Let me begin at the beginning, as the saying goes.
And explain myself as thoroughly as I can, I suppose.

On January 2nd, I received the terrible news
From my biopsy results - and I got those PC blues.
Maybe my results were, in fact, another person's fate
I've got too much to do in life on my king-size plate.

Chorus

I'm 55 years old and have many more to go.
This wasn't part of the bargain I signed up for Ernie's show.
It must be someone else whose name might sound like mine
Call me back with better news if you would be so kind..

A Series of Unfortunate Events
(continued)

PC used to stand for political correctness as an answer.
But now unfortunately it now means prostate cancer.
What to do, where to go, when to take some action?
There's much to learn, a lot to read – I only know a fraction.

Chorus

Why me? Why not? Why now? I thought. It's tough news to swallow.
And for about two days or more in my misery I did wallow.
I'm better now – see better times ahead in store for me
Lots to do, plan and hope and much more things to see.

In dreams we have when we are either asleep or wide awake
The order of things don't often sense to me do make.
So - - - the words that I use to capture my complicated emotion
Are jumbled all together like a big Picasso commotion.

Chorus

I'm up for this huge challenge and for what's to be in store
Some people say it's kinda like going off to war
But I like to think about it in a much more peaceful way.
I'm off on a surprise journey I didn't plan yesterday!

I now hear words that didn't make much sense not long ago
Like Gleason Score, blood banking, Cat Scan and urine flow.
It's hard to keep one's dignity and self-respect intact
When discussions center mainly on some pretty private acts.

Chorus

This saga that I tell you and that I start today
Will take you on my journey some place down the way.
Where it ends I do not know, right now it's just a guess
I'll get back to you in three weeks or two or one or more or less.

Ernie's Journey, Reflections in Verse – Volume 2, p. 32+

After several days of feeling sorry for myself upon receiving the news of prostate cancer, I decided to write down my thoughts with a John Prine tune going on in my head.

Ode to a Circle of Friends

Bird on the feeder and squirrel in the air
Friends stand around to watch the big fanfare.

A body dying - a soul rising
Bonding, tears - embracing all.

Pain, pain and painful sounds
Can't do more in my morphine rounds.

Thinking often of how you are –
As you wonder on that star;

Waiting for what's in store for you –
After this earthly life is through.

I've been to Pittsburgh. I've been to Maine.
You've been to hell and back and living through the pain.

Dry lips, crusted tongue,
Vaseline, suctioning on the run.

Residual and output are words I often hear
Jevity? I'll take that for $800 Alex, my dear.

Oxygen tube running in your nose;
Awake, asleep, and off you doze.

Classical music - Vivaldi I hear
"What's that, Pat? You want opera near."

Jokes, pain, music, and talk
Beethoven, Vivaldi, Mozart, and Bach.

The words will come and the tears will flow.
We make our peace; Todd surely knows.

"How long's that breath been?" A voice calls out.
"It's 6 times per minute and rattles about."

The circle of support has rallied to the call.
Pat has the schedule taped up on the wall.

"What color's that ceiling?" We ask Sarah's friend, Chris
"Is it green, yellow, limon or the color of bliss?"

The nurses are grand. The nurses are great.
The nurses all know that Todd takes the cake.

I had the honor of being a member of a circle of support for Raymond "Todd" Kilroy at the time of his bout with cancer. I'm not sure this poem does justice to the sights and sounds surrounding that event. I believe I learned some important lessons that have influenced me greatly. I continue to advance toward my own inevitable encounter with the dying process with a keener perspective and peace of mind. Todd was an influential self-advocate in the disability rights community as a person living with cerebral palsy.

Ode to a Circle of Friends (continued)

The atmosphere here is good to behold.
It's the best in Connecticut Joyce has been told.

There's a rattle I hear, a long, drawn out sigh.
When will the next one come from on high?

Todd does it his way and there's no telling why
He's been living that way since he was just five.

Maybe I'll do it. Maybe I'll wait.
Just do it soon 'cause maybe's too late.

I want suction. I want love.
I want a touch without a rubber glove.

It's cold in the room. Todd's warm to the touch.
Put on a coat, mittens, a scarf, gloves and such.

Different reactions, from people who come near.
Some bring sadness and some bring good cheer.

We all have our needs each and every one;
But Todd's needs come first, he's the one on the run.

He's not running for Congress, nor running a race.
He's running to heaven with a smile of his face.

There's peace in his soul. There's joy in his heart.
There are tears in our eyes as we watch him depart.

Maybe it sounds a little bit odd
But, no one on earth has the spirit of Todd.

He brings friends together, they're all pretty handy
From Columbia, Manchester, Bristol, and Granby.

To be continued … This isn't the end.
We'll all be together when the circle meets again.

Ernie's Journey, Reflections in Verse – Volume 1, p. 60+

The High Stakes Tests Are Gonna Fall

Oh, where have you been, my walking man?
Oh, where have you been, out walking the land?

I've walked in my home state – yes, from the Northeast;
10 miles at a time in the rain and the heat.
I've been in the country and I've been in many a town.
My steps take me up and they also bring me down.
I've stepped on the sidewalk and I've stepped in the street.
I've walked alone and with many people I meet.
Each day's a new dawn with the friends that I make.
Their spirit is with me every step that I take.

And I'll walk, yes I'll walk, yes I'll walk - - - for us all
For the High Stakes Tests - - - are Gonna Fall.

Oh, what did you see, my walking man?
Oh, what did you see, out walking the land?

I saw young and old and black and white.
I saw love and honor in the day and the night.
I saw signs and posters after walking many miles.
I saw hope on their faces and was met with huge smiles.
I saw defiance and grit and not backing down.
That's what I saw as I went town by town.

And I'll walk, yes I'll walk, yes I'll walk - - - for us all
For the High Stakes Tests - - - are Gonna Fall.

Oh, what did you hear, my walking man?
Oh, what did you hear, out walking the land?

I heard teachers & students & parents all pleading,
Get rid of those TESTS – our hearts are a'bleeding!
I heard shouts of anguish and long, drawn out sighing.
I heard heart-wrenching screams amid all the crying.
I heard laughter from the people who make all their money
Off the backs of the students who don't think it's that funny.
I heard critics who say we all can do better.
I heard from hundreds of parents who sent me their letters.

And I'll walk, yes I'll walk, yes I'll walk - - - for us all
For the High Stakes Tests - - - are Gonna Fall.

The High Stakes Tests Are Gonna Fall (continued)

Oh, who did you meet, my walking man?
Oh, who did you meet, out walking the land?

I met the eyes of the students in all types of schools.
I met our next senators – the future makers of new rules.
I met parents who just want what's right and what's just.
They all are behind me – Washington DC or bust!
I met people who offered me food and a drink.
I met people who wanted to hear what I think.
I met hard working people who will not give up hope.
I met love & faith – two great ways we can cope.

And I'll walk, yes I'll walk, yes I'll walk - - - for us all
For the High Stakes Tests - - - are Gonna Fall.

Oh, what will you do now, my walking man?
Oh, what will you do now, out walking the land?

I'll talk to all people who know things are not right.
I'll share all the stories and help them shed some light.
I'll work with our teachers for better ways to assess.
I'll help make real plans to get us out of this mess.
I'll dedicate my life to the students I meet
In the literacy center – when they come once a week.
I'll never back down from the high stakes test lies
From the people who deceive and pull the wool over our eyes.

And I'll walk, yes I'll walk, yes I'll walk - - - for us all
For the High Stakes Tests - - - are Gonna Fall.

How Bob Dylan Influences My Life and Work -
A Never-Ending Document, p. 19+

To Honor a Colleague's Advocacy

This connection has its roots in Dylan's A Hard Rain's A Gonna Fall. My colleague and friend, Jesse Turner, walked from Connecticut to Washington DC on two occasions to protest the harm inflicted on children by the high-stakes assessment culture that pervades our schools. I applaud Jesse's dedication and advocacy on behalf of all children.

Memories of Mom and Dad

When I was about as high as a knee,
I acquired the nickname “Little Ernie”.
That’s not bad when you’re two or three,
But sometimes it’s embarrassing at age 30!
Yet now that I am 54
Little Ernie suites me like never before.

E for the effort to be upright and true.
R for the respect I have for you.
N for two daughters who have this initial.
I for integrity, which is unconditional.
E for energy it takes to be models for my life – who influence me.

The things I remember about Mom and Dad
Leave my heart feeling quite glad.
Dad is thoughtful and extremely bright,
And most of the time I find that he’s right
When he makes decisions over a glass of wine
Like buying Volkswagen “Bugs” one at a time
Or taking school pictures dispensing free, plastic combs
That broke right in two before you got home.
He picked a part of the country to finally settle down –
In Aroostook County - the Jewel of Maine’s crown.
In the rooms of the house we had permanent fixtures
To develop rolls of film into black & white pictures.
I remember waking up with a great big yawn
Sometime just around the crack of dawn
In mid-September it appears to me
Out pickin’ potatoes – down on my knees –
A quarter a barrel - - - working the field
For buying new clothes the money would yield.
Dirty clothes were always washed and fresh each day
As Mom saw us off and about our way.
We had the cleanest clothes of anyone there:
Thick flannel shirts and long underwear.

Memories of Mom and Dad (continued)

Mom worked tirelessly at her jobs each day.
Her energy level was up to high all the way -
Up at 5:30 for a cup of hot tea
Red Rose or Salada with saccharin there'd be;
Then working with negatives in the dark at the printer
In spring, summer, fall and in long, cold winter.
She could decorate cakes and hem up dresses
Cook up a storm amid all our messes.

Christmas times were often quite a sight
As we opened our presents amid the spotlight
Of the movie camera as it wound into gear
To remind us of this special time of year.
There was a rocking horse and an electric train
And a "Colt 45" pistol to be just like John Wayne.

I remember the piano we had in our house.
We learned to play Bach, Mozart and Strauss.
Carol excelled in her "opus perfecta"
The pride of one Sister Benedicta!

I think as I get older I gain an appreciation
Of all their sacrifices, hard work & determination.
We all do the best that we possibly can
To add to the legacy of the Pancsofar clan.

Ernie's Journey, Reflections in Verse – Volume , p. 20+

During one of our family reunions, my niece, Sharon, assembled pictures from across the years featuring my mom and dad. She asked each of the six children to say something while some of the pictures that included their images were being shown. I recorded this poem as my contribution.

A Final Reflection . . . For Now

I picked up a book from off my shelf
to see what Parker Palmer[a] had to say
About aging and being on the brink
of how to live out your best self today.

The world is full of questions, wonder and awe
as I pursue new goals and dreams.
I remember from my past of the lessons I learned
just like the river teeth[b] of the streams.

Where to go? What to do?
What is in store for me?
How many miles have I got left to go
to discover who I am meant to be?

The answer always lies in the process
of how you live out each day.
My journey continues on
in my own unique "Ernie" way.

Then / Now / Beyond, p. 51

[a] ***Palmer, P. (2018). On the brink of everything: Grace, gravity & getting old. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.***

[b] ***Duncan, D. J. (1996). River teeth. New York: Bantam Books. He described a phenomena called "river teeth," which are the scattering of the knots from fallen tress long since decomposed that lie across the width of many rivers. These hardened, knotty parts of the tree do not dissolve; instead, they create ripples in which the river receives new oxygen and divert the flow of the river along new currents. Duncan's book includes the "river teeth" of his life: stories stuck in his memory, stories that once belonged to other activities long since forgotten. (Pancsofar, 1997)***