

Three Poems by Len Blanchard

Bumper Sticker Poem, 2009

The harsh lesson of the past forty years:

HE WHO DIES WITH THE MOST TOYS

WINS

DIES

-Len Blanchard

Getting Rhythm

I think society may be overrated
we learn things in solitude we can't
if we're never alone long enough to hear
the rhythm of our own heart
beating until washing dishes, putting out the trash,
filling out our tax returns, even falling asleep, all
necessary quotidian activities and any others
we may elect to perform are performed as a dancer
does a dance, if not without efforts, apparently effortlessly.

as the fortunate among us breathe. This can help
when that day which must does arrive and
we find our breathing belabored. Our heart will be
slowing then, but having practiced we may find
a slow waltz has its pleasures. In solitude, the imagination
is more likely to be liberated, and having experienced
freedom when we had the energy to use it, we may

as heat and force wane find ourselves remembering
the graceful circling of a hawk we had lost sight of
when it dived, confident, knowing what it was doing
and why. Unlike seagulls or pigeons, the hawk
rarely congregates, socialized only when it has reason
it obeys like instinct, more faithfully than most men do
law. Laws, though, are made by men often deaf to
the strains to which the hawk swoops in its hunger, men
marching to a drumbeat dictated by ignorance, arrogance
and fear, who don't dance a waltz, let alone the tango or
rumba.

-Len Blanchard

Technology Driven

Able-bodied and empty-handed, he was about
to push the door in front of him open
to exit the building when, suddenly remembering,
he hit with a clenched fist instead the big knob
on the wall to his right meant for
the handicapped and otherwise over-burdened
and—voila!—without lifting a finger
walked out into the open air.

Outside, on the campus sidewalks, I once
caught myself foolishly on the verge of greeting
a student walking towards me, staring at me
and speaking incomprehensibly, before, surprised,
I noted her eyes didn't see me and her words
were meant for someone I couldn't see, someone
whose voice was being magically transmitted
by a phone she didn't even have to carry.

In the parking lot, I see people pointing keys
at parked cars which beep or honk
and, sometimes, flash their lights in response
as if they're alive. In the classroom, hoping
I'm teaching, I observe students furtively
checking cell phones nestled in their laps
for text messages and understand why
so few of these students write clear,
grammatically correct sentences arranged
logically in fully developed paragraphs.
Later, in the cafeteria, I see another student
watching on his cell phone a movie while
another, at an adjacent table with wires plugged
into her swaying head, eats her lunch in silence,
and I understand as well why so many students
don't read much of anything at all, let alone literature.

At home, I let my answering machine

retrieve for me myriad calls from strangers
wanting to provide me relief
from debts I don't have, or a new mortgage
I don't need, or a current model automobile,
perhaps one featuring a talking box
to tell me how to get where I want to go.
Without reading a map, without even thinking,
if only I remember to tell it where it is
I want to go, when suddenly I recall
an ad I came across recently beckoning me
to come to the Yucatan because
in the land of the Maya I'd be in another time.

Since no one calls to offer me
affordable health insurance, especially
a policy covering medications manufactured
to alleviate the despair I sometimes feel
about to overwhelm me when I consider
how difficult it is here, where I am today,

to bump into people with eyes and ears
wide open who, so engaged by the world
they see, hear, smell and feel around them
that, should they, oblivious, collide
with me they would simply be speechless,
able only to smile apologetically, I think
I need to travel back, to another time.

-Len Blanchard