

Poems to consider when under stress – like last week

I don't know how you handled the recent "preventive" blackout that left me wondering how many days it would last and compelled us for want of anything else to go to bed at 7pm. I experienced of whirl of internal aggravation – over the absence of any utilities to make of my house a home again; over my sense of impotence dwelling so far below the powers that be – inaccessible in this age of communication except by way of recorded relay messages followed by insane music. Even one's faith is put to the test.

But in retrospect I did learn things. My wife's caretakers reminded me that we had a large picnic ice container in which we could store our perishables; also that I had a recharger in my car that could revive my cell phone; also that Parsons still had a slim flashlight that could light up a whole room; also that, when my one and only Rayovac Lamp went out, what I needed was not a new bulb but four new D batteries . . . It was an education of which, if not for the blackout, I would remain contentedly ignorant.

The secret in rough times is to recover one's store of the quieter, even more mystical resources of one's existence – fond memories, even. As does my old fellow friar Richard Brugger, the poet laureate of Auburn, Washington, in these poems - Brugger being of Pennsylvania German stock:

The Galactic Milky Way

Late thirties the Axis Powers gobble up Europe. / I strategically walk into Pipersville Store, / Put my dime on the counter. Mrs. Bissey says nothing, / Reaches into her candy cabinet, hands me a Milky Way. // In Arithmetic hours before I grapple with 22 X 24. / My mind wanders, / Anticipates unctuous bite mellow-swirled chocolate, / Unwraps brown-green wrapper, / Knows instinctively rectangular dimension: height, length, / Width, depth, texture, consistency, preeminent luxurious delight. // World War II comes, goes, marriages, births, deaths, other wars, / Men on the moon, monsoons in Nepal, earthquakes in Colombia. / Ambiance of the Milky Way galactic never changes. / No new wrappers or mind-boggling merchandizing, / Only unspeakable magic whenever I take my first bite. / Along with immense gratification, / I think only a dime, / Mrs. Bissey, / The quiet unassuming interaction / At the Pipersville Store.

Peck's Pond

Love Nest, our place / in the midst of the Pocono's / dense woods, wood chucks / myriad of birds, orange / colored salamanders, ferns / blanketing the rich earth, / a rustic life. // No electricity, / kerosene lamps, wind-up phonograph, / indescribable mountain air, walks, / long hikes in the mountains, / rowing from one island to another / between tree stumps, fear / of rattlesnakes. Used to dock / on Sunny Rock / and think. // Everything happened about then. / My brother Franzie died. / He was seventeen / and I was eight. My father started drinking / that wouldn't stop; died of cirrhosis when I was thirteen. / Was I glum? Come to think of it---and I'm just beginning to now---Yeah. / How'd we deal with it? / We didn't / We took off to Peck's Pond.

