

Poetry Series

Richard Lackman
- poems -

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Richard Lackman()

I have worked for the past 30 years as an orthopaedic cancer surgeon and find that reading and writing poetry is a good release and a good way to relax. I most enjoy poems with set rhythm and rhyme although I like a lot of free verse as well.

A Doctor's Dilemma

I've seen so much of death that I should know
Of my own fate and my mortality
And yet I seem to live my life as though
Death and dying don't apply to me.

Richard Lackman

A Fearful Patient

I saw that she was crying as I entered through the door
Alone, afraid and worried about what she might endure
Her pain had come on slowly until recently but then
Had suddenly increased until she thought it was a 10

She felt that she was dying and a cripple she would be
A wheelchair in an old folk's home was all that she could see
She was so frail and so upset she found it hard to speak
She was not easy to console her outlook was so bleak

I sat beside her, held her hand and looked her in the eye
I listened quite intently so she knew she could rely
Upon my strict attention to her story and her plight
As she realized together we could work to make things right

Only when her discourse ended did I start to speak
Explaining diagnoses which I knew that we should seek
So by this time her confidence and hopefulness I gained
And watched as prior fear and dread had from her quickly drained

Indeed she had a cancer that was treatable and so
We started on a treatment plan and watched her spirits grow
Now several years since I first saw her she is still alive
And grateful for her time on Earth and all she can derive

Richard Lackman

A Friend Named Mike

I thought again today about a friend from long ago
He was a lovely person and at times I miss him so
Mike Fallon was his name and him I never will forget
His young life ended suddenly, for me with much regret

He was a colleague and he had his own distinctive smile
Beaming and enthusiastic in John Lennon style
Relaxed and yet insightful about life or so it seemed
Contented with each day in what he lived and what he dreamed

He was a valued resource, one on whom I had relied
For difficult decisions as his best he always tried
He inspired steadfast confidence and always spoke the truth
For despite all his successes he maintained the soul of youth

How stunned was I to learn that day that he abruptly died
A victim of life's harshness driving him to suicide
If you had asked me previously do I know him well
I would have answered yes and been unable to foretell

The tragic ending of his life cut short in all its glory
A happy tale bespoiled by the ending of the story
All that remains for me is to remember my good friend
Accepting that his death remains a wound time cannot mend

Richard Lackman

A Life I Could Not Save

She did not feel her age though she was old
But still looked young as she was often told
And so she was a vibrant 95
Happy to be healthy and alive

And yet this cancer slowly had appeared
A diagnosis worse than she had feared
A stark intrusion in a peaceful life
Now filled with fear, uncertainty and strife

I truly understood her fragile state
And yet could not abandon her to fate
So radiation seemed the treatment choice
As I spoke with an optimistic voice

Regrettably this gave her no relief
And so her pain improvement was but brief
I tried my best to help her understand
Treatments that her age might not withstand

So we embarked upon an operation
Strong in our resolve, not desperation
Hoping to alleviate her plight
Hoping that our chosen path was right

We planned each detail, each step we would take
And all of the dissection we would make
Our anesthesia colleagues also knew
That potential complications might ensue

So here we were combined in our intent
Knowing what success or failure meant
But willing to attempt this for her sake
As this procedure we did undertake

The surgery initially went well
But then quickly her blood pressure fell
And despite our efforts to restore her breath
All had to finally accept her death

So what to make of this, did we do wrong
Should we have let her suffering prolong
Could we ignore her misery and pain
How could we know our efforts were in vain

Her sudden death of course was unexpected
And certainly we all felt quite dejected
We did our best to help this woman through
But could not change events that would ensue

I've thought about this patient many times
Wondering if I had missed the signs
That would have clearly pushed me to pursue
A different course than what we chose to do

As I experience doubt and regret
I move on with my daily life and yet
My memories of this woman linger on
Never from my recollection gone

This is a burden I agreed to bear
A knowing part of what it is to care
And so I take these memories to my grave
Concerning those whose lives I could not save

Richard Lackman

A Poet's Shame

I set out to write this poem and I had a simple plan.
I'd avoid all things prosaic and I'd do the best I can
To optimize the content and the grammar and the rhyme
And of course I'd tell a story that would echo for all time

I thought about the subject and the role the hero played
But when I penned the verses then I saw the hero fade
I read my lines and wondered if all poets had the same
Misunderstanding with the words and felt a poet's shame

I struggled with my concept and the form the poem took
Yet I doubt that you will ever see this poem in a book
For only I can understand the effort and the time
And a parent's love responsible for each and every line

And so like children poems cause you happiness and pride
Or conversely they cause torment as you quiver deep inside
And yet I do still write them and some I think are fine
But some are just so terrible I wish they weren't mine.

Richard Lackman

A Solitary Life

How is it at the age of sixty I am still alone
Each day walking, eating, sleeping always on my own
How did I miss the partnership that most of us attain
My only walking partner seems to be my walking cane

I never had that many friends; I never quite fit in
Was never picked when picking sides by those who liked to win
I was more a quiet person sitting by myself
Never in the foreground like a book back on the shelf

And yet I have my attributes; I'm not a total bore
I do love writing poetry, whoever it is for
I like to walk and ride a bike and fish along a lake
I drink red wine on holidays and always like a cake

And yet I guess that's not enough to occupy a spouse
Not enough for me to share my life or share my house
So I must trudge on silently and always all alone
Traveling a path that is uncertain and unknown
Towards a final victory or just a final end
Which may be years away or simply right around the bend

Either way I'll look back on my life and know I had
A wonderful existence as a man and as a lad
I'll look back on my solitary life and yes I'll see
That life for me was more than prose; was more like poetry

Richard Lackman

Almost Cancer

Today I met a man who thought that he was truly dying
This brush with his mortality had left him lost and crying
He never really understood how fragile life can be
And now his hopes and desperation focused square on me

I had a kindly conversation with him and his wife
I guaranteed that I would do my best to save his life
I reassured him that this tumor might still be benign
If not we hoped that we had caught it in the nick of time

Next day I gave him his good news that it was nothing bad
He and his wife were quite relieved and yet they both seemed sad
They looked back at their lives and saw so many wasted years
They smoked too much and drank too much and cried too many tears

That day that he thought he was gone was really quite a gift
It made him see that up 'til then his life was just adrift
Although I never had to work a wonder with a knife
That day was not forgotten and in fact it saved his life.

Richard Lackman

An Elderly Patient

She hardly thought the visit was worthwhile
And just as I was opening her file
She said that she was too old to be treated
A statement that she several times repeated

I reassured her that I understood
Her situation but perhaps we could
Review her treatment options just for now
To understand the why and what and how

She was a happy person all her life
A loving mother, grand-mother and wife
She understood how blessed her life had been
Yet knew this was a fight she might not win

She said that she had not the energy
To pursue a treatment course with me
She said that she felt prepared to die
Then fear welled up and she began to cry

I consoled her, did the best I could
To describe some treatments that she should
Consider in the context of her age
Ideas that she could comprehend and gauge

She trusted me enough to move ahead
As we worked to dispel her fear and dread
And so her quality of life remained
As each day she saw happiness sustained

I treated her for two years from that day
Then was informed that she had passed away
But this had been a clear cut victory
A gift to her and certainly to me

Richard Lackman

April

Walking by a meadow I see April in full bloom
Each blade of grass come back again from winter's frosty tomb
Each tree and shrub and hedge are wearing green to mark the time
Each vine is ready to repeat its daring upward climb
Even insects are abuzz with endless energy
As robins dressed in vests of red sing their soliloquies
Deer and rabbit, fox and fowl need not look far for food
As gentle rains and warming sun insure a tranquil mood
And as for me I too can feel my spirit rising high
As April's beauty warms the heart of every passer-by

Richard Lackman

Beauty

Beauty as a pure ideal is too often obscured
By prices paid for objects that are then in closets stored
Works of art beyond our reach within dim hallways hung
Like church bells bricked within a building never to be rung.

Is that what beauty really is or is it something more
As simple as a flower or a wave upon the shore
As common as a sunset with the sky in pink and blue
Or meadows emerald green at sunrise sparkling in the dew

So much we see is beautiful if we just stop to gaze
And rise above the moment, far above life's hectic haze
Forgetting all that burdens us about our daily life
So that equanimity replaces needless strife

For it is then that beauty in its truest form appears
Whether in a face we love or music that we hear
Whether in a sunset or a walk along a park
A beach at dawn, a bird in flight, an evening turning dark

So beauty in its many forms surrounds us everyday
If we can only recognize it, simply find a way
To see the beauty in our lives as we live every minute
And only then appreciate each life and all within it

Richard Lackman

Because I Could Not Ever Bear To Say Goodbye To You

Because I could not ever bear to say goodbye to you
I've had to write it in a poem as some poets do
Hoping that my rhyme and verses help you understand
How sad I am to see my death now take me by the hand

My love for you is all that ever really satisfied
The needs, wants and emotions I kept hidden deep inside
How blessed was I each morning just to see your smiling face
And then to end each evening locked in your fond embrace

The happiness you brought to me throughout our married life
Was more than I could ever have expected from a wife
Your kind, unselfish manner and your generosity
Were clearly more than human, more a God-like fantasy

And so within this fantasy I watched each day go by
Never quite believing that one day I too would die
So what can heaven bring me that is better, more or new
Compared to what I lived each day in heaven here with you

And so my love I take my leave not knowing what to say
Not able to express my love, not able to convey
The depth of feeling and the gratitude I hold inside
For every wondrous moment since you first became my bride

Richard Lackman

Building For Eternity

He looked all around him and saw monuments so vast
Built with good intentions to endure and hold steadfast
Awesome structures pointing up to heaven as to say
Here is my creation and forever it will stay

How he envied those whose makers surely had the skill
And patience as their best ideas to form they did distill
Castles with great towers and a moat so deep and wide
Pyramids whose stature other structures did deride

How this young builder yearned to be the one who would create
That which wind and weather never could or would ablate
And yet when all was done and evening closed another day
My son laid down his bucket on the beach and walked away

Richard Lackman

Cancer Sucks

Each day is a blessing but with cancer not so much
It detracts from everything I see and do and touch
I may still have my life for now but understand that pain
And fear, fatigue and loneliness forever will remain.

My life is just so different now than what it used to be
My prior peace of mind replaced with harsh uncertainty
And every time I make a forward step I seem to find
I encounter other problems as my health unwinds

When people ask me how I am I always say "Just fine"
But each day is a challenge as I try to re-define
The meaning of my time on earth, my family and friends
Never knowing really where I am or where it ends

This sickness really, really sucks, of that I can be sure
I only want to get back to the way things were before
And yet I know that that is just not possible for me
And so I need to live my life however it may be

So here I go again, another day, another hour
How will I have the strength to move, where can I find the power
I'm tired, just so tired of this illness and my fate
But I'll keep on this happy face and I'll just have to wait.

Richard Lackman

Cancer Survivor

Having worked for 35 years as an orthopedic cancer surgeon, I have certainly experienced life in an unusual way. It has been a wonderful experience for me, though trying at times. Yet these experiences have provided me with insight that I would not otherwise have attained. I was asked to write a short discourse on what it means to be a cancer survivor and I have attempted to relate my viewpoint in the following paragraphs.

What does it mean to be a cancer survivor? Truth be told, every day each one of us is a life survivor. I have not yet figured out why it is that our creator took so much effort to put us here and yet made it temporary. I suspect however, that the answer to this question may exist in the larger view of the universe around us. Not only are our lives temporary but so is our planet, our solar system, our galaxy and indeed; the entire universe as we know it.

As scientists now look far out into the stars, it is apparent that our small blue planet and the life it supports is indeed a rare if not singular fortunate thing. That we are here to occupy even this tiny bit of space during this tiny bit of time that we are given, in my own mind, this helps me to understand how precious every day is for each of us. Whether by destiny or circumstance, we each lead our individual lives and experience this life for varying amounts of time.

I truly believe that the dignity and inherent value of our lives is determined not by our quantity of time but rather our quality of thought and action. Such, what better legacy could each of us have than to leave the earth a better place than we found. No one will ever win a Nobel Prize and yet true nobility remains within the reach of each of us. It takes to ensure this nobility is kindness, patience and optimism. Obviously any serious illness, such as cancer, reminds us in a harsh and scary way of our own mortality which we tend to forget in the course of our day-to-day lives. These diseases and their treatment can detract from the physical quality of our lives, they do not change the fact that every day is precious. It is why it is so important for those undergoing cancer treatments, as well as for those whose treatments are behind them; and for that matter, for all of us, to experience love on a daily basis. This love can certainly come to us, it must also come from us. This love can be directed toward another person, an activity that we cherish or simply an appreciation of the beauty around us. And I believe that it is this love and the fact of our existence that makes each day precious.

So in truth, by understanding the blessing each day represents; each of us is doing much more than simply surviving.

Richard Lackman

Childhood Cancer Survivor

I saw her back, now 28 and mother of 2 boys
And yet at our first visit her mom brought along her toys
What miracle had happened that enabled her to live
And now allowed her to go forth with all she has to give

I knew how bravely she approached this horrible disease
Balancing her hopes and fears as if on a trapeze
Suffering in silence, looking older than her age
Amazing that this youngster had the wisdom of a sage

Even on the darkest days she always had a smile
An inner strength to look beyond and always know that while
Life seemed so unpleasant it would hopefully change course
Emanating fortitude from some unknown resource

But now she seemed just quite content with all things as they are
Leaving prior ugliness and pain behind her far
Proud of what she had become more than what she went through
Able to appreciate her world as few can do

I understood this was a moment I was blessed to see
A victory for her more than a victory for me
So any time I wonder what my life is all about
I recall her serenity which then removes all doubt

Richard Lackman

Children Walking In The Rain

When I scurry about on a rainy day
Acting annoyed at the rain
I sometimes remember a time far away
When I viewed raindrops with no disdain

I think of a time when I was quite young
And my brother and I would go out
With ball cap and sandals and raincoat that hung
Down to our feet all about

We delighted in plowing through puddle and pond
Formed by a strong passing storm
We discovered indeed we were equally fond
Of the air which seemed fragrant and warm

After prancing about back to mom we would go
All excited from our recent quest
Then quick to the tub with her two boys in tow
To get clean at our mother's behest

So today as I stand in my suit and dress shoes
Looking out as the raindrops are falling
I remember those days when I never withdrew
From the raindrops when they came a calling

Richard Lackman

Destiny

The lives we lead, lead us with certainty
Toward an end that some call destiny
But are we really destined? Is it fate?
Or is it a decision we cognate?

Do we control what happens once we're born?
Can we make ourselves happy or forlorn?
If so then I choose happiness for me
But whom do I inform so it will be

I'm not so sure it happens just that way
I suspect we'd be mistaken to downplay
The active role that each of us must take
Each morning as we find ourselves awake

So I begin another day of life
Where I must see the heartache, face the strife
And deal again with life's uncertainty
Which I accept as certain destiny

Richard Lackman

Dreams

Each night I take a journey on my bed
To places that are not what they might seem
I conjure up these countries in my head
As I lay down to sleep and start to dream

My dreams are never lucid as the day
But seem distorted as the details flow
As such I never seem to find a way
To navigate strange streets where strangers go

Intriguing episodes of travels lost
On unknown continents where valleys lie
Between great mountains covered deep with frost
Where rivers run their silent course and die

From where does my imagination draw
Such stories I could not write with a pen
And yet there always seems to be a flaw
Prevents me ever traveling there again

Richard Lackman

Evan

When I lost my son to a tragedy I thought that love would end
But I never guessed how it could be that my love for him would bend
And sway like a tree in a summer storm and quiver but never break
While the memory of a love well worn would lessen my heartache
I speak to my son each morning and pray with him every night
He comments without speaking and fills my days with light
My thoughts are blessed with images of his wit and grace
And constantly as I go on I see his smiling face
I cherish what God gave me although it did not last
And try to live in the present while giving thanks for the past
Yet I know that as long as my will holds fast
We will always together share
Feelings so strong, so deep, so vast
And forever remain a pair

Richard Lackman

Everlasting Love

I wonder if I'll ever find an everlasting love
Or continue as I have just drifting at the mercy of
An aimless current of emotions in a sea of doubt
Drowning in uncertainty as love I go without

I know there must be someone looking for my love as well
A beautiful Maria, Beatrice or Annabelle
As lovely as a poem set in timeless fluid rhyme
As soothing as a church bell ringing out its pleasing chime

How long must I wait for love to bring me to its shores
Where I can bask under its sunlight with a woman I adore
And lie in bed each night beside this creature soft and warm
A heavenly experience of sight and mind and form

So as I lay alone with only hope to nurse my heart
I pray to be united with my loving counterpart
And then to float forever on a cloud sent from above
As we live on together in an everlasting love

Richard Lackman

Falun Gong

China as a country dates to ancient history
Beginning with the Stone Age culture 3000 BC
Inhabited by Yang Shao people in crude settlements
But able to farm and create essential implements

From there the culture flourished via many dynasties
But always with an eye to its evolving pedigree
And so dynastic change was oft accompanied by war
Typically violent as related in folklore

But gradually the culture changed and peace became the goal
As learned men pursued the arts and delved into their souls
Experiencing some religious ideology
Accepting Buddhist or Confucian style theology

This changed under the rule of China's communistic state
As government replaced religion as it would dictate
And so the Falun Gong was formed out of necessity
To foster meditation and a kind philosophy
Where exercise, compassion and forbearance were ideals
And so its followers felt they had nothing to conceal

Eventually the government felt threatened by this group
Afraid that Falun Gong would cause religions to recoup
So that it banned the practice and ideals for which it stood
Persecuting those who were committed to the good

And so Falun Gong joined other faiths that over time
Have seen its practices condemned; equated to a crime
And yet no government can kill our intrinsic desire
To pursue our faith and love no matter what transpires.

Richard Lackman

From Here To There

I left my home one morning to go from here to there
The route seemed fairly simple so I left without a care
Then on the way it seemed less clear as roads were long and winding
And halfway there I knew that I knew not what I was finding
I learned that day that life takes more directions than I know
So now I always stop to think a bit before I go

Richard Lackman

Goodbye My Love - A Smoker's Lament

I learned today that I am almost dead
Although I've felt but just a little pain
The cancer in my lung went to my head
And life for me will never be the same

I started smoking at an early age
But never thought that it would bother me
But now my feelings merge into a rage
Oh God above, how stupid could I be

How could I risk my precious time with you
For such a silly pleasure after all
How can I now accept our days are few
And all the guilt which now upon me falls

But worse for our two children, what to say
How to explain that I will soon depart
As my soul longs for nothing but to stay
There are no words to ease my broken heart

I'm sorry for this trial I've put you through
I hope you understand that as I die
My love for you is real and strong and true
So now my darling let me say goodbye

Richard Lackman

Happiness

As evening nears I pause my thoughts to recollect today
And though my prose is not a match for Poe or Hemingway
One need not be an author; published wealthy and renowned
To understand that happiness is more than just a noun

Today found me quite happy; why this was I am not sure
The morning and the afternoon were really quite obscure
No grandiose experience or fortune came my way
My work pursued in quietude was certainly blasé

Perhaps pursuing happiness prevents achieving it
For happiness is not a product of our strength or wit
It's not something we gather by the bushel such as corn
Nor are we granted it through any birthright when we're born

For those who understand it happiness comes from within
And not from whom we are or what we have or where we've been
So happiness you see is really easy to attain
Just look inside yourself and find the goodness you contain

Then let that goodness rule your thoughts and yes your actions too
While always to your values and beliefs remaining true
Then happiness will not be something you need to pursue
As happiness with all its joy will find its place in you.

Richard Lackman

Here And Now

As I look around me, everything I see
Looks the same as yesterday with no uncertainty
I see nothing changing; time seems not to move
Life for me seems quite secure, what more is there to prove

All I see is here and now as that is all there is
I know a friend with troubles but those troubles are just his
Things like that don't bother me I have not reached the stage
As sickness and infirmity come with an older age

I hear that health is fleeting but for me that can't be true
If something bad was happening I'd surely have a clue
But if I saw the future I would have reason to cry
I'd discover that to my surprise tomorrow I will die

Richard Lackman

I Always Had Intended To Retire

I always had intended to retire
To some charming coastal town or shire
To spend my latter years in quietude
And all my plans and projects to conclude

I would wake up every morning with the sun
And think of nothing more than having fun
No stress or worries would dare mar the peace
And all responsibility would cease

I'd gaze beyond the ocean where the sky
With wondrous pinks and blues does pacify
I'd stare contentedly deep into space
Where worries disappear without a trace

Oh Lord how good it felt to just pretend
That in my leisure I'd have time to spend
Far from the hectic life I've come to know
Filled with anxiety I can't forego

Yet in my haste I never laid the plan
So all my scheduled endings overran
As constantly at work I did reside
Until today when finally I died

Richard Lackman

I Fail To Understand What God Was Thinking

I am trying hard to understand
Why God placed us here in such a state
Still I am afraid to reprimand
Him who put me here and tempt my fate

Considering how complex humans are
And how much work it took to get us here
Evolution surely has come far
And yet mortality is always near

I fail to understand what God was thinking
When He made our lives so transient
Did He hope that each of us was linking
To some cosmic heavenly event

How could He commit so great an error
And overrate our sensitivities
Should we all now look up at Him with terror
Or just accept our poor proclivities

Despite my real attempts at introspection
I'll never know just what He had in mind
And so I daily ply the intersection
Of infinity and earthly time

Richard Lackman

I Fell In Love A Year Ago

I fell in love a year ago believing it would be
The permanent expression of the love she shared with me
Our feelings were so powerful, so deep and so intense
Without a hint of selfishness and surely no pretense

I thought about her day and night; she occupied my dreams
Her countenance enveloped me, my life she did redeem
She walked with grace and beauty and her speech was always kind
I knew this was my one true love, no other would I find

Days and weeks passed quickly as my love knew no restraint
And so our little problems never merited complaint
And thus to all but love I shed emotions so confined
Reality had been replaced by lofty state of mind

But then her love just ended as she left without a trace
Leaving me with only recollections of her face
And memories of a love affair I thought would long endure
A timeless love whose time ran out now gone forever more

I do not know if I'll survive, my mind is in a trance
I feel each moment that this is a fatal circumstance
I heard before of people dying with a broken heart
But never dreamed that I would star in such a tragic part

I am a young man with my future lying still ahead
And yet I have no energy to go beyond my bed
My friends tell me that time will heal my heart and yet I know
My life will not continue if her love I must forego

Yet each day going forward the sun again does rise
As time dims recollection of the gleam in her blue eyes
I now look back with fondness on our vibrant love affair
And hope to find a love again but know not when or where

Richard Lackman

June

If I had one month to last all year it would be June
Living like Algonquins `neath the full strawberry moon
Resting on a grassy carpet laid beneath my feet
While daises and white lilies emanate an odor sweet

Of course I would go back in time, back to a simpler age
With wondrous natural beauty rolling hills and scarlet sage
As streams cascade past waterfalls `neath skies of azure blue
While mountains painted forest green deep piety imbue

How wonderful the world could be and just how opportune
If we could live a hundred years blessed by the days of June
But nature never would agree and has no alibi
As time continues passing and tomorrow starts July

Richard Lackman

Life Eternal

As I walk on a sunny April day
And smell the sweet aroma of the spring
I feel life's resurrection in a way
That only green grass and blue skies can bring

I see the beauty in the world around me
And thank God that I've had a chance to be
Conscious of the consciousness around me
As my life merges with infinity

So whether we count time in years or minutes
We're equally important in the end
So live life in the moment without limit
And know that life itself will never end

Richard Lackman

Life Is Just A Room With Many Doors

Life is just a room with many doors
Unknown passages through which light pours
Inviting us to sample all that lies
Beyond what we encounter with our eyes

Each door brings an experience in life
Conveying happiness or yielding strife
Testing our commitment and what's more
Straining our emotions to the core

Each passage leads us to a different place
Another unknown road, another face
A true relationship or maybe not
Perhaps a few good times, perhaps a lot

But either way the journey is just ours
Dependent on our courage as it towers
Above injustice, prejudice and more
Above all that which is worth fighting for

At last to every journey comes an end
Far in the future or around the bend
Explaining life in just a simple rhyme
An understanding echoing through time

Richard Lackman

Life's Mystery

Why should it be so difficult for people to be nice
And I am talking everyday not only once or twice
Why should it be so hard for folks to care for one another
Why should it be so hard to treat each stranger like a brother

My parents taught me right from wrong and taught me to respect
Each person's personality, each person's intellect
And so I live with gentle thoughts about those all around me
And so I strive for happiness and kindness to surround me

I see sparrows seeking food and watch them seem to share it
And deer in winter with their young who calmly seem to bear it
I see so many creatures who all seem to get along
But when I see how people act they seem to not belong

Life on earth is just so short I never understand
Folks whose actions undermine or falsely reprimand
The good that's part of all of us if we just let it be
So why this happens I don't know it's just a mystery

Richard Lackman

Lightning And Thunder

When I was just a little child playing in my room
I saw the sudden lightning strike and heard the thunder boom
I'd run out to the front porch to sit and watch the show
Awed by Mother Nature and the power that would go
From neighborhood to neighborhood with most amazing speed
Like some ferocious rider tracking quickly on his steed

These battles always ended with fresh breeze and starry skies
As winds no longer whistled and clouds no longer cried
What fun it was to sit and watch as storm clouds gathered quickly
And yes I do still sit in awe though I am old and sickly
I still shudder at the power and the violence of the storms
And still imagine evil armies in the shadows that they form

Yet soon I know that I will watch my final conflagration
As I move ever closer to my cosmic destination
For yes I know that lives move on with storm-like speed and fury
And finally we wait for God to be our final jury
Let it be said of us that we were lightning and were thunder
As we marched boldly through our lives while others fell asunder

Richard Lackman

Looking Back

It seems as I get older I think more about the past
I recount pains and pleasures that were destined not to last
Romances that blossomed but then all too quickly died
Leaving me uncertain as to when I laughed or cried

Cloudy recollections of success and failure too
Whirl about my consciousness with little to construe
I can remember certain days and surely certain nights
But names and faces fade away like colors in lamplight

I'm sure that somewhere in the past I forged a different path
Waged a war with evil or incurred a villain's wrath
Clarified the truth or merely set the record straight
Regarding details too mundane to now reiterate

Yet even if I could remember all of my success
Just what would it amount to and yes whom would I impress
Who will remember what I've done or what I've failed to do
As I embrace obscurity and bid the world adieu

And so it goes for each of us whether rich or poor
Whether weak or powerful, detested or adored
We have so little time to seek and find what we have dreamed
Yet hoping that in the pursuit we'll surely be redeemed

Richard Lackman

My Amputation

I woke up from the surgery minus my left leg
With searing pain below my hip as if a powder keg
Exploded deep within my thigh leaving nothing there
But tissues sewn together which was more that I could bear

O God why have you chosen me to undergo this pain
What have I done to justify this horrible disdain
What can my life offer me now I am so beset
The sunrise of my life on earth replaced by cruel sunset

Time passes, first the minutes then the hours then the days
As memory of the first few weeks is shrouded in a haze
But slowly I recover and each morning I arise
Committed more to life than to incurring my demise

The pain, so knife-like, so intense has melted with the snow
And now as spring awakens in my chair I slowly go
To the window of my bedroom and the windows of my mind
Wondering if I will be forever so confined

Then spring gives way to summer and my strength and spirits soar
Life's images return to me now clearer than before
No longer does the vision in the mirror cause such dread
No longer must I hide beneath the covers of my bed

Amazingly my life regains familiar normalcy
As I recoil from the depths of my infirmity
And while I know I never will exactly be the same
I still retain my sense of worth and have not changed my name
For I am still the one I was and what is yet to be
Did not die with my left leg but lives inside of me

Richard Lackman

My First Kiss

I still remember my first kiss though forty years have passed
The beauty of the moment and the thrill will ever last
Etched into my memory as words into a stone
Clearer than the clearest night that I have ever known

The dazzling beauty of her face would shame the fairest rose
Description of her wood brown eyes defies the finest prose
Her full lips seemed to beckon in the fading light of day
Like some heavenly creation so what could I do but stay

We stared into each other's eyes for what seemed endless time
Then as we kissed church bells nearby by chance began to chime
The kiss went on and on as I hoped it would never end
While I longed for the relationship that this kiss would portend

I held her in my arms as one would hold a fragile vase
Then opening my eyes I felt my body all ablaze
When finally it ended I knew this had been a kiss
That would leave me bound forever in the depths of love's abyss

I never will forget the utter pleasure I embraced
With both our lips together in my memory encased
This was a gift to treasure for all time and I know well
This gift that I was given by my beautiful Danielle

Richard Lackman

My Hospital Stay

Four white walls and a ceiling light defined my scenic view
A small TV on a pull out arm and a picture quite askew
Old tan spreads and thin white sheets were thrown about the bed
And fell in heaps about my feet like a puffy thunderhead

My dancing partner beeped at me with menacing alarm
With four small wheels and a steel gray shaft and an IV in my arm
Instead of shirts and pants and shoes I simply wore a gown
With knotted straps and broken snaps like a frightful hand-me-down

How ludicrous I must have looked while standing at the door
Like some great driftwood log all worn and washed up on the shore
Or an aging statue pitted by the winds along the sea
Barely recognizable as what it used to be

I recall my precious youth and good times that I had
Pursuing life with courage like a reborn Gallihad
But I survived the worst of it and I am here to say
With great appreciation I thank God for every day

Richard Lackman

My Last Day

Today I learned my cancer diagnosis
And obviously I was stunned to hear
The implications of my poor prognosis
As I filled with anxiety and fear

How is it now that at so young an age
My life should suddenly come to an end
Am I mature enough to reach the stage
Where life can take so tortuous a bend

This morning all my worries were financial
Could I afford a new car; pay the bills
It now all seems so very unsubstantial
Compared to having this disease that kills

I cannot die right now, I've things to do
I need to raise my children and what's more
My obligations are long overdue
I cannot pass through any final door

But suddenly I have to stop ignoring
The transient state of what seemed so secure
Best not to waste my energy abhorring
This illness which seems not to have a cure

I feel so all alone and isolated
Yet I am not the first to wonder why
My insight into life was so belated
But that itself is no reason to cry

So as I say goodbye to those I know
My consciousness is quickly slipping by
My thoughts and dreams and cares begin to slow
As peacefully I drift and then I die

Richard Lackman

My One True Love

I knew I'd finally found my one true love
After years of searching fruitlessly
She came to me as gently as a dove
And stilled the winds of my uncertainty

She brought to me a calm and peaceful tone
And banished all the terror of the night
Her love for me was all I thought to own
And everything I understood as right

She let me see a brighter side of life
One that I had never seen before
She bore my children and remained my wife
And always sought to comfort me and more

Years have passed and still I love her so
And with her love I have been truly blessed
And so onward together we shall go
As lovers by each others love possessed

Richard Lackman

My Time On Earth

What if life took only one rotation of a fan
Birth and death occurring both within so short a span
Or how about an hour, so what difference would this be
Is it too short a time to count or would I still be me?
What if a life occurred completely within just one week?
Would we have time to search and find whatever we should seek?
Or how about one year? Would this be time enough to say
I lived my life completely and fulfilled it day by day
Perhaps a decade really is the logical extent
To figure out exactly what our time on earth has meant
A century may be too long, too long for us to stay
Avoiding many obstacles while keeping death at bay
Do lives derive their value from the length of time we're here
Does the metronome of life decide who's worthless and who's dear
Or is it not at all that way, do we derive our worth
Within our daily battles on this battleground called Earth
It must be more than time to say who's better and who's best
Who follows or who leads as an example for the rest
I only hope my epitaph contains a simple rhyme
Explaining how my life on earth made good use of my time.

Richard Lackman

My Turn

And finally it is my turn so as a patient I did learn
About my dreadful diagnosis and unfortunate prognosis.
Throughout my medical career I have had a gnawing fear
As to how I would respond or have the strength to look beyond
The darker side of a disease; sink deep or put myself at ease
This is no easy thing to do; to join my former patients who
Have traveled this uneasy road and carried this most heavy load
I really am afraid to see; will my behavior burden me
Despite what I have always said regarding loneliness and dread
Amazingly, I think of spring; the warmth and colors it does bring
Or sitting on a summer day behind the house beside the bay
It seems that naturally I turn inside myself as I discern
The meaning of my time on Earth and emanating since my birth
My place in life

Richard Lackman

November

As long as I live I will always remember
The dark dreary desolate days of November
With lengthening nights and a chill in the air
And a strong wind that warns everyone to prepare
For the winter ahead with its deadening cold
As the harshest of seasons again is foretold

No more are the bright reds and yellows of fall
Replaced by the winds of an oncoming squall
Which darkens the scenery already gray
And devoid of the song of a robin or jay
While in the still forest stark shadows appear
As the weather increasingly turns more severe

So beware all you travelers; heed my advice
Lest the winds of November extract their dear price
As they grow ever stronger a war they do wage
With the power to blow all the words off this page
So retreat to your homes and preserve the last embers
As soon will begin the cold month of December

Richard Lackman

October Leaves

As I look out upon October leaves
And brown grass weathered by the Autumn sun
I see the shafts of light a bare branch cleaves
And so much of creation now undone

I feel the sorrow of a world defeated
And wonder if my life reflects the same
Cycle of life's consciousness depleted
Like a picture that has fallen from its frame

I bare my heart to painful introspection
Regarding simple pleasures never found
Like finding images of one's reflection
In a fleeting pool of water ever bound

Where now are all the promises of Spring
That light and warmth and flowers would repair
What now do winter wind and shadows bring
But dower images and dark despair

And yet as I recall from years gone by
That following the darkness and the cold
If I can my own darker moods defy
Will then the flowers of spring at last unfold

And so it goes and so my life repeats
The cycles of the seasons in my mind
And so my memory at last deletes
The darker side of life I often find

Richard Lackman

Oh God I Wake To Yet Another Day

Oh God I wake to yet another day
And at first glance I'm not so sure that's good
For I have work to do and bills to pay
So I get started doing what I should

But as the day goes on I realize
The blessings that are mine each day I wake
And so it makes no sense to demonize
That which helps me on the path I take

For life is what occurs each day we live
Nothing more than what each one has been
And in the end we're judged on what we give
Not on what we get or what we win

So God thank you for yet another day
For family, for job and work and health
For granting me the wisdom that I may
Truly understand what is true wealth

Richard Lackman

Old Man

As I go through life I understand
The changes that my body must endure
And as for me I've learned how to withstand
My aging as I pass through every door

It seems much less severe until I see
My mirrored image, when with much surprise
I see an old man staring back at me
With weathered features framing sunken eyes

I view attractive women with a glance
And wonder how exciting it would be
To foster just a short, intense romance
But then recall what they must see in me

I guess I had my chance to dance and fling
While still a young man living out each day
But now the time has come for me to sing
One last ballad as I slip away

Richard Lackman

Planning Out My Day

I'm laying here in bed one morning planning out my day.
I think I know how it will go and think I know the way
But then I think I'm not so sure and have my doubts about it
And realized my plan was gone and had to go without it
And so it is that life assures so little that we do
Yet every day we live we are among the privileged few
Who watch the planets spinning and who feel the gentle breeze
And as long as we are healthy do exactly as we please
So thank the Lord for all you have and all the things you are
Eternity is closing in and really not that far

Richard Lackman

Poetry As A Painting

How very like a painting, a poem seems to me
Revealing in its form and content verbal artistry
Framed within the pages of a book or magazine
Rendering a tale of woe or story so serene

Each word a brushstroke placed just so; it's meaning to insure
Combining to create a scene with beauty and allure
A literary style so exacting and so terse
Whether clothed in flowing rhyme or written in free verse

Each line is blended with the others to complete the view
A portrait of the subject in its own distinct milieu
A glimpse into reality or dreamy make-believe
Providing insight into truths no other could perceive

So it is that poems can create a scene so clear
Can communicate a feeling whether lofty or austere
And in so doing help us to decipher for all time
The meaning of our lives set in the beauty of a rhyme

Richard Lackman

Poetry Is Language Squared

What is it about poetry that I find so appealing
Perhaps it is the storyline that I find so revealing
Maybe it is the rhythm and the cadence so freewheeling
Or simply how the rhyme leaves me with such a happy feeling

I must admit that I enjoy the sound when lines are paired
Or when the poem's content shows how much the poet dared
In fact it's true that poems to our best prose are compared
So with beauty and a story poetry is language squared

Richard Lackman

Pursuing Chemotherapy

Pursuing Chemotherapy

Oh God I wake to yet another day
As I pursue my chemotherapy
Once more I'll keep anxiety at bay
And struggle with my own mortality
I'll positively change my current state
And do all that I can to guarantee
That death from this disease is not my fate
As I pursue my own longevity

Today I'll fight the battle once again
And look to friends and family whom I love
I'll concentrate on good times, not the pain
And try to keep my spirits well above
The lower ebb of what I know has been
When I surrender to my stress and fears
I think this is a battle I can win
Resolve will prove more powerful than tears

So here I sit and watch the drugs infuse
And slowly feel the nausea and chills
It surely would be easy to confuse
My treatment with the cancer that it kills
So here I sit and here I bless the day
And realize that many have it worse
And now as all the drugs are put away
Today was still a blessing not a curse

So thank you God for yet another day
As I now meet with family and friends
I know that with your help I'll find a way
To rise above no matter what the end

Richard Lackman

Reaching The Sea

Between us and the coast a mountain stands
With jagged peaks and cliffs no man can climb
Like some fierce giant holding up his hands
A threatening menace present for all time

Why does this monster keep us from the shore
And hold us ever prisoners of this land
Is it our fate to helplessly endure
And succumb to what we do not understand

Or is it our true nature to ascend
To overcome great obstacles and more
To climb to lofty heights and never bend
To reach the sea and walk along the shore

Come with me now as we begin to climb
To places where our grace and honor reach
Come with me now to find truth in our time
To reach the sea and walk along the beach

Richard Lackman

Sage Advice

I asked the Elder for his sage advice
Hoping his reply would be concise.
What is the greatest prize I can attain?
What possession will insure the greatest gain?
Is it money I should most desire?
Can I rely on riches to inspire?
Should I covet power, land or fame,
Or prowess in some manly sporting game?
What is the key to minimizing strife?
What would most insure a tranquil life?
The Elder simply looked off into space
With no expression telling on his face.
"The answer is no complex thought or rhyme
The greatest treasure you possess is time."

Richard Lackman

Snow

As flakes fall softly through the chilling air
And land one on another all around
They cover what was previously bare
Obscuring details of the rocky ground

The snow creates a soft un-trodden layer
That hushes all the sounds of normal life
And in so doing leaves us unaware
Of vexing troubles and our daily strife

And so it is that God created snow
To help each one of us to comprehend
The beauty we will surely come to know
Once life on earth at last comes to an end

Richard Lackman

Strangers On The Street

When I approached a stranger on the street
I always looked to take in each detail
My scrutiny was speedy yet discreet
As I surmised with little to avail
I imagined I could guess their occupation
And pride myself on my own estimation
Of their background and their social standing
True knowledge of their issues notwithstanding
So how amazed was I at the deflection
Of my own countenance seen in reflection
How little I could construe from the portrait
That my old confidence I had to forfeit
So now as I pass strangers on the street
I concentrate on where to land my feet

Richard Lackman

The Age Of 80

At the age of eighty I am not prepared to die
I still wake up each morning with a new reason to try
To live life to its fullest and indeed to live each day
Appreciating what I have as worries slip away

If eighty years have taught me anything they taught me that
Life is unpredictable; not set in one format
So each day I anticipate surprises and events
That take me down a different path without my own consent

Accepting twists and turns in life has many dividends
One never really knows from how things start how they will end
And many blessings started as a disappointing act
Yet ended as a positive and that is just a fact

The other fact I understand is that all life is short
So I pursue true happiness while misery I thwart
These lessons helped me live my life accepting who I am
While never wasting time to wail and moan ad nauseam

Richard Lackman

The Anxious Patient

I don't feel right
I'm sure this is the start of something bad
I know I'm right
I would not feel this way unless I had
Some bad disease
I only hope that Dr. Smith can find it
Put me at ease
Believe that there is something more behind it
I know before
That I have had so many false complaints
But this is more
I hope he won't approach me with restraint
His attitude
So cocky and his righteous indignation
His comments rude
I never understand his explanation
And now my head
Is throbbing like my stomach and my back
Oh how I dread
His typing while I only see is his back
I'm good as dead
I'm sure that this gets much worse by the hour
Put me in bed
Don't say you can't. I know you have the power
This won't take long
Believe me and just order lots of tests
I can't be wrong
Just say you ordered them at my behest
So I was right
He told me that all I have is a cold
I need to fight
This virus or pneumonia may take hold
I'll take his words
For now and I'll be sure to heed his warning
But what he heard
He'll hear again when I call in the morning.

Richard Lackman

The Beautiful Sky

I laid down in a meadow and beheld the endless sky
Some clouds formed in the distance and I watched them pass me by
Between the clouds I surveyed endless seas of azure blue
Which with the coming sunset took on more an orange hue
As daytime turned to evening the orange turned to gray
While colors slowly disappeared to mark the end of day
But black was not the only tone to occupy the sky
As myriads of stars appeared before my watchful eyes
Less vivid than the daytime view but certainly a scene
As striking and inspiring as any I would deem
A painting much less beautiful would surely win a prize
Especially if the canvas occupied just half this size
But paintings are just poor attempts to duplicate what has
Already been created with more beauty and pizzazz
So make a habit every day while going to and fro
To glance up at the sky and take in nature's grandest show
You'll not be disappointed and what's more I'm sure you'll find
This beauty lends serenity and aids your state of mind

Richard Lackman

The Bike Path

On a clear October day I peddle all my cares away
Through the vineyard, down the hill, around the curve, beside the mill
My bike is light with gears so spaced to conquer all the hills I face
My tires planted on the road, thin but strong to bear the load

The trail ascends in wondrous form, the gravel thin and brown and warm
Trees and flowers stand in line each one helping to define
The path through forest, field and town, some unknown and some renowned
Yet all contribute to the ride, a graceful motion unified

What better way to spend my time than passing through this scene sublime
Committed to the course and pace with not a worry on my face
Now as my ride comes to an end, I'll wait to see around the bend
But I'll come back another day and once again I'll find my way.

Richard Lackman

The Cancer Surgeon

Having treated cancer patients for now 30 years
I've seen fear and anguish and of course so many tears
I've seen human nature at its worst and at its best
And witnessed those whose courage placed them well above the rest

Many of these struggles sadly ended in defeat
Yet even for these patients I saw life was still replete
With dignity and calm acceptance, humor and at last
Equanimity as what was present turned to past

I thank God for my blessings and the privilege granted me
In some small way to brighten lives plagued with infirmity
And though I know I saved some lives and helped more than a few
What I was given in return was much more than my due.

Richard Lackman

The Candle

The candle on the table sheds its light
In undulating columns from its flame
Its energy foretells a future bright
Devoid of apathy, devoid of blame
It burns with ever more intensity
While molten wax supports the arching fire
And so ignores its sad propensity
To shorten its own life as it inspires
How very like a candle is my life
As I attempt in my time to distinguish
My efforts to diminish earthly strife
And in the act myself do I extinguish

Richard Lackman

The Darker Side Of Man

Mankind is a mystery and I don't understand
Whether we are here by chance or guided by God's hand
There is so much good about us it could clearly fill a book
And yet to see the darker side you merely have to look

How can a species that can rise to love and empathy
Alternatively act with carelessness and cruelty
How is it that one person can be humble, kind and good
And yet another misbehave in ways they never should

It's hard for me to justify the darker side of man
Perhaps our goodness fades away if we no longer can
Obey the order that pervades our world and all within it
Or if we just accept a wicked act as we begin it

And yet despite the darkness I perceive there is more light
As people strive to vanquish poverty, disease and blight
With altruistic deeds to overcome evil and pride
As we elevate our nature and surmount the darker side

Richard Lackman

The Ever Changing Tide

The metronome for life remains the ever changing tide
Flowing in and ebbing out with ever constant stride
Wearing down the barriers that keep the seas constrained
With unsurpassed tenacity, its nature is ingrained

Twice each day the tide creeps in to claim defenseless land
Encouraging strong waves to crush great rocks to tiny sand
Echoing the passing time and counting down the days
Like some great Lord of Armageddon fixed in timeless gaze

For centuries of centuries the tides have ruled our earth
Bringing death to some and yet to others giving birth
Leveling fierce mountains and transforming fertile fields
To barren depths of sea bed which no longer flowers yield

And so for us as for all life on earth the tides foretell
The end of time when death will have no earthly parallel
But until then we need to watch and be prepared to hide
From the raw eternal power of the now ascending tide.

Richard Lackman

The Forest Near My Home

There is a forest near my home where frequently I go
To walk amidst God's plantings and to feel the breezes blow
To savor air as cool and fresh as can be felt on earth
To cleanse my mood and spirit and to foster my rebirth

The gentle shade protects me from the harshness of the sun
While the grandeur of the tallest trees is not to be outdone
I love to watch squirrels dart about while searching for their food
While birds rest on still branches as in peaceful solitude

Deeper in the woods there is a stream that sings a song
A burbling cacophony that lasts the summer long
A pleasant sound that beckons all to rest under its spell
Perhaps to sleep and dream and thus all worries to dispel

The forest is a special place where one can always find
Peace in the surroundings that renews your peace of mind
And so it is that frequently I tread the forest trail
To renew my optimism as I take in each detail

Richard Lackman

The Gentleman On A Park Bench

I spied him on a park bench, my how happy he did seem
As contented as a sleeping man within a pleasant dream
So full of equanimity, so tranquil and refined
Obviously no distress disturbed his state of mind

His suit was made of finest wool; his shirt was starched and clean
His countenance reflected by shoes polished to a sheen
Who was this lordly gentleman who graced our neighborhood?
I did not seem to recognize him though I thought I should

For clearly he was someone I could envy and admire
Someone whose lavish lifestyle I could strive for and desire
If only I could take his place as God I wished I might
How high would then my spirits soar, oh what a pure delight.

Just then his nurses came toward him helping him to stand
As carefully they crossed the cobbles walking hand in hand
Only then I realized this gentleman was blind
Living in a land of darkness, physically confined

Yet how obtuse was my existence though I had my sight
I could not recognize my fortune, only saw my plight
How ironic that a blind man finally helped me see
The blessings and good fortune that have daily come to me.

Richard Lackman

The Goodness Of The Ocean

What is it about a pond or lake or ocean
That attracts us so and sets in motion
Feelings of serenity and peace
So that common worries seem to cease

The attraction must be more than just the beauty of a shore
As that's a scene that we've all seen a thousand times before
There must be deeper meaning that inspires us to go
And walk along a sandy beach or watch a river flow

Perhaps the water acts as a connection
To our deeper thoughts seeking direction
And though the water may be calm or rough
We perceive in it a truth and that's enough

To re-invigorate our spirit and to help us see
The beauty which surrounds us and which helps to set us free
From stress and strife as there can be no worries or commotion
While lying peacefully beside the goodness of the ocean.

Richard Lackman

The Hostile Patient

I understood his hostile tone and why he doubted me
So many had he seen before and yet they could not see
Below his hard veneer of anger which his pain induced
Symptoms which were quickly to hysteria reduced

How to breach his thick defenses and obtain his trust
Before discussing his condition first I knew I must
Communicate with him as simply normal people do
Establishing rapport and then approaching things anew

My overstated kindness and my obvious concern
Left him feeling quite defenseless as he did discern
That we could hold a conversation wherein facts would be
Clear of misconception as together we would see

And so his diagnosis from obscurity appeared
Nothing fatal, fortunately not what he had feared
I did not save a life that day and yet I surely learned
The value of compassion and the trust that I had earned

Richard Lackman

The Soldier

He started as a little boy from any small hometown
He loved to throw and hit a ball but never gained renown
His parents taught him right from wrong and how to do his best
So he grew up in a normal way about like all the rest

Like any young adult he had his dreams and yes his fears
And yet possessed a wisdom that was older than his years
When war broke out his conscience pushed him to join in the fight
And as he left for war he told his mom he'd be alright

He learned the art of soldiering; learned how to fight and shoot
But yet his core humanity remained beyond repute
And so this ordinary boy found himself one day
In an extraordinary battle in a country far away

Thinking not about himself but of his fellow men
He bravely fought toward a vicious enemy and then
He died there on that battlefield on just another day
While we were left with memories and tears to wipe away

This is a common tale about such fine, uncommon men
Who fight and die for freedom never asking where or when
So now we must forgive ourselves for letting them depart
Knowing that forgiveness lives in every soldier's heart

Richard Lackman

The Surgeon

Today I sadly watched a patient die
Despite my efforts to halt his disease
He used his time on earth to beautify
His surroundings and put us at ease

His life was not unusual or grand
Yet he displayed nobility and grace
He sought no pity and made no demands
While equanimity he did embrace

His death was neither publicized nor known
Beyond his friends and his small family
And yet his dignity and courage shone
With brilliant light for all mankind to see

And so it is for us to understand
That though we do not always save the life
It is our task to weather and withstand
That which we cannot conquer with a knife

Richard Lackman

The Tree In My Backyard

Each day as I go out I see the tree in my backyard
I think it is a pin oak and its wood is very hard
The tree was here when I moved in about 10 years ago
Since then it got much larger with new branches that did grow
Almost across the whole yard from the west side to the east
Though now that it's about full grown I think it's growing ceased

The tree is like a neighbor whom I've known a long, long time
It surely is a beauty and I'm grateful that it's mine
Sometimes I stand and study it amazed at what I see
I know that it's alive and wonder if it senses me
The longer I'm around it I think I can tell its mood
And whether it is doing well or needing more plant food.

In spring, it seems a happy tree with leaves of fragile green
In summer, it is fully robed and regal as a queen
In fall its beauty ages as its leaves turn red and brown
In winter, branches cold and still communicate a frown
But most times it seems quite content to spread out in my yard
Not doing more than living which for it seems not too hard

As humans I think there are lessons we can learn from trees
For starters how their splendor seems to put us all at ease
And how they give so much and ask so little in return
Whether sassafras or oak or just a tiny fern
Trees seem to always live their lives with dignity and grace
While changes in the weather they seem always to embrace
They shade the earth and clean the air and never create strife
Showing us what time has taught them to succeed in life

Richard Lackman

The Wrong Diagnosis

Oh God you know how hard I try
To understand the how and why
Of each decision that I make
If only for my patients' sake

But deep inside I am aware
No matter how much I might care
Some diagnoses will be wrong
As surely as the day is long

How can I cope with my mistakes
How will my confidence not break
How can I bear their suffering
And all the guilt which it will bring

I am no God but just a man
No worse and yet no better than
Any ordinary Joe
Or anyone whom you might know

I have taken on this task
But after years I have to ask
Can I continue on this path
Risking yet another's wrath

I suppose all I can do
Is move along and see this through
Remembering how hard I tried
Humility out-pacing pride

Richard Lackman

Two Strangers Passing On The Street

The two were different as could be as anyone could surely see
One was tall and thick and white, the other black and thin and slight

To look at them it would be clear to any stranger standing near
That neither would think of the other as a friend or as a brother

And yet when chance would have them meet while simply walking down the
street

The two engaged in friendly chatter as if nothing else did matter

This was truly kind behavior fitting for a saint or savior
The apex of humanity invoking kind civility

I would be happy to report that they were people of some sort
But then I would be a deceiver, they were poodle and retriever.

Richard Lackman

Walking Beside A Railroad Track

Something about walking beside a railroad track
Induces fond nostalgia in my mind
As dusty memories come rushing back
No longer in obscurity confined

Is it the steel rails running to forever
Or ties so neatly spaced that lead me on
And from my daily drudgery dis sever
As to a kinder place I'm quickly drawn

Railroad tracks are pastoral and silent
Calm, enticing, lovely and serene
Taking me somewhere beyond the present
Outside my life and commonplace routine

The sweet smell of the creosote suffuses
Combining with the greenery nearby
Inducing relaxation as if muses
Were singing incantations to the sky

As images of stately windowed clubcars,
Gondolas each with blackened hills of coal,
Ride behind an engine named "Exemplar";
With syncopated hissing as she rolls

But not today as there are no trains running
On this decrepit long abandoned track
Just bees and moths and butterfly's all shunning
My shadow as it fills each rocky crack

And so I walk with no one else beside me
Absorbing this extraordinary scene
Leaving harsh reality behind me
Engulfed in beauty most have never seen.

Richard D. Lackman, M.D. April 10,2017

Richard Lackman

What Was Richard Corey Thinking

Now at the age of sixty, I am quite prepared to die
I am neither old nor sickly but have no reason to try
To add another decade for no purpose or no gain
As I've had all the experiences I wanted to attain

At this point going forward there is nothing but decline
As things I could do easily are now no longer mine
It's now hard to read the paper with my right hand shaking so
And as for my many interests, I just no longer go

Leaves that fall around me, remind me every day
That though God put us here he never meant for us to stay
And as things go six decades are quite long enough for me
As I've seen enough of suffering and enough uncertainty

I also know that life is not just valued by its length
But rather by our valor and our loving and our strength
I know that each of us must give account of what we've done
So I'll hasten this review and pull the trigger on this gun

Richard Lackman

Why Have You Gone? How Could You Go?

Why have you gone? How could you go
Still knowing that I love you so
My life is empty, still as stone
Each day a struggle all alone

I hunger for your gentle touch
Your compliments that meant so much
The beauty of your smiling face
Your body clothed in supple lace

My life with you was nothing less
Than earthly pleasures heaven blessed
A world of touch and form and sight
Extraordinary day and night

When first we met I knew at once
That whether days or weeks or months
Time with you was beyond measure
Beyond joy and beyond pleasure

Then for what seemed eternity
I loved just you and you just me
A timeless love beyond all doubt
A timeless love whose time ran out

What of my life is left to live
What more of me is left to give
Just memories but none to share
A broken heart but none to care.

Richard Lackman

Winter Into Spring

From March back through November landscapes draped in black and white
As knife-like shadows in the forests pierced the dimming light
And even mighty rivers disappeared under the strain
Of crushing flows of ice after a night of freezing rain

For now the only sounds that crackle out through winter's hush
Are frozen pods of snow which to the ground from treetops rush
Exploding on the forest floor as from a fearsome hoard
Of Norsemen fighting wildly for their own wintry warlord

And so it is that through the coldest season of the year
We sequester deep within the halls that we hold dear
Waiting for the sunrise and the promise it will bring
That the stranglehold of winter will be broken by the spring

Then finally it happens; ice flows melt and streams cascade
Flowers bloom and fruit trees blossom while the pall of winter fades
Black and white are all forgotten as a rainbow now appears
And the cycle reinvigorates the passing of the years

Richard Lackman

Winter Is Upon Us Now

Mid-winter is upon us now, the days are short and cold
Deep snow and ice define our view as winter's freeze takes hold
All sounds are muted; clear but hushed by blankets cold and white
As darkness settles o'er the land as if eternal night

Few creatures venture out to feed in nights of freezing rain
For meager is the sustenance that winter's fields contain
While others in their burrows lie and so defy the weather
Resting on a carpet made of leaves or straw or heather

I long for signs of early spring but March is spring's November
When fierce storms batter hills and plains as clearly I remember
So I must wait for April's warmth to finally rout the cold
Replacing barren landscapes with new vistas green and gold.

Richard Lackman

Worn Stairs

Whenever I observe a flight of stairs
With treads worn thin by years of trudging feet
I cannot help but ponder those who dared
To master all life's challenges they'd meet
For climbing stairs is like pursuing life
One bit of destiny at each set time
As if it were apportioned by a knife
Or set in some pentameter of rhyme
Each stair requires careful balance still
And strength of heart if we are to ascend
Each stair requires courage and the will
To bring each stage of life a noble end
Yet all who trudge the stairs of life do see
Rewards that come with striving for their cause
And on the stairs they find serenity
From toiling through life's labors without pause
So like the stairs our lives go up or down
Show majesty or fall to lesser fates
So go trudge up the stairs and find a crown
Or slide down step by step 'til life abates

Richard Lackman